

The Night of Temptation

Nicholas Goss

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THE NIGHT OF TEMPTATION

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

LIFE'S SHOP WINDOW
SIX WOMEN
SELF AND THE OTHER
THE ETERNAL FIRES
FIVE NIGHTS
THE LIFE SENTENCE
ANNA LOMBARD
(500,000 copies)
SIX CHAPTERS OF A MAN'S
LIFE
TO-MORROW?
PAULA
THE WOMAN WHO DIDN'T
A GIRL OF THE KLONDIKE
THE RELIGION OF EVELYN
HASTINGS
LIFE OF MY HEART

THE NIGHT OF TEMPTATION

BY

VICTORIA CROSS

Author of

“Life’s Shop Window,” “Six Women,”
etc., etc.

Pseud

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CHAPTER I

HOME

SHE lay in a quiet corner of the Rectory Garden, looking up at the majestic white clouds, that sailed across the blue of the summer sky, like Viking ships under full sail, speeding along over the deep blue of a limitless ocean. How glorious they were! How wonderful to contemplate these summer nimbi, in their immaculate, fleecy whiteness, in their shadowy recesses, in their glistening summits. They were pure and radiant, even as the girl's soul was, and by their affinity with it they seemed to call it up to them, to lift it up away from the sordid Rectory, with its harsh, unloving father, its dejected, stupid mother, its quarrelling daughters; away from the horrible village, full of vice, squalor and disease; away from the narrow stone church, in which a yet narrower creed was weekly preached. Away from all these, to the contemplation of the pure and the beautiful, these glorious clouds called her, and she loved them, the friends and companions of her thoughts through many a lonely hour. Now, in the hush of a hot afternoon, she lay very still under the gold rain of the laburnum-trees, looking up at the towering snowy masses in a rapture of delight.

Stossop Rectory lay, in its old-fashioned country grounds, inland from the sea about two miles on the south coast of Devon, and a very beautiful old place it was, long and low, containing many rooms, and having a deep gabled roof of Titian-red, that showed above the wealth of white and delicately pink roses that veiled its face ; and if the Rectory from without looked the typical, peaceful English home, so within was it the really typical English home, full of disunion, pettiness, quarrelling, hatred and discontent. The English are perhaps of all humanity the greatest humbugs ; they love, more than anything in the world, pretence ; and the farther away the reality is from the sham they create out of their imagination the more dearly they love the sham ; hence those amazing pictures of the domestic hearth, the happy, rosy-cheeked children, the smiling mother, the loving, protective father ; the gentle temper, the sunny cheerfulness, the air of rest and peace and safety pervading all. Has anyone ever been the inmate of, or the visitor to, such a home ? Let all who read these lines recall their recollections of home, their own and those they have seen. Whoever it was who wrote “Home, Sweet Home,” one feels the author must have been an orphan and brought up at a school. The home in reality is the place where everyone feels they can display their bad temper and their bad manners, as they can wear their oldest, ugliest clothes and their surliest expressions. The heroic manly brothers of the story-book spend their time in pulling their sisters’ hair and kicking them under the table ; the gentle sisters hate them secretly in return ; the father grumbles at his wife, the wife scolds the servants ; and

so the dreary round of home life goes on. The boys escape from it as soon as they can; the girls rebelliously long to follow; the unhappy wife and mother hopes vaguely for some relief that never comes; the father cherishes in his heart the memory of his last visit to town, *on business*, and looks forward eagerly to the next, enlivening the dull and stupid time that intervenes by bullying his wife.

Such is the average home, and such was it at Stossop Rectory, and, but for the enchanted garden, Regina Marlow, the Rector's youngest daughter, who was of totally different stamp and mould from the rest of the family, could never have supported life in it at all.

Some really golden moments in Mrs. Marlow's life, in which the Rector had no part—being away on one of his business visits to town—accounted for Regina. She was the child of love and passion, as the others were of distaste and dislike, for Mrs. Marlow entertained for her husband that solid dislike which is the basis of most marital relations. And the elder daughters, conceived and nurtured in it, had hate engrained in every fibre of their bodies. It showed in the spiteful gleams of their eyes, in the downward turn of their mouths, in their incessant wrangling with each other. Beautiful they were, for Mrs. Marlow was beautiful, but the nine months of inward revolt from her husband that she had suffered in each case while they were being fashioned within her, of her blood and her bone and her brain, had given them both the terrible curse of the hating soul. But Regina, born of love, of that sweet tenderness like the spring zephyr, of that wild passion like

a summer storm, that the gods have given to man to illumine the darkness of the earth, Regina showed love and joy in every line of her face and form. Her mouth was always smiling; its curves were upwards, not downwards. Her voice was soft with all the notes of love and sex in it; her eyelids were sweetly arched; her blue eyes overflowed with tenderness and smiles; her soul was filled to the brim with what the Rector would have termed the "grace of God," and not untruly, since God is love. All through Regina's creation her mother had dwelt on love and on its sacred memories, and naturally enough the embryo conceived and reared in love and loving thoughts came into the world fitted out and equipped for love. Ah, how little do women think of the evil they commit when they give themselves to husbands they do not love! The hideous crime it is, blacker than any, to give life to beings burdened with evil souls, do they ever think of it? That hate they feel for the father, do they not realise how it bears fruit in the evil tempers and passions of the child? Mrs. Marlow, deep in her inmost heart, always thought of Regina, the gay, loving, radiant Regina, as the child of sin. No small voice ever whispered to her that the elder children, fretful, vicious, unhealthy, malicious, reflections of her own state of mind when bearing them, were children of a greater sin—against themselves, against society, against the human race.

She never thought about these things; she believed herself to be a thoroughly good woman, who had sinned once in her life, but sincerely repented.

She had dismissed her lover; she had turned a deaf ear to the passionate entreaties of the man who really

wanted her, and had remained to do her duty to her husband, who would have been so thankful to be free from her — duty, which consisted, according to her ideas, in counting his shirts when they came home from the wash, presiding over the flannel club he had started in the village, seeing that he had three meals a day and that the Rectory was cleaned up twice a year, and disliking him extremely the whole time.

Year by year her face hardened and her intellect diminished under the cramping influence of the hating habit; now and then the lines of her mouth would soften and her eyes glow tenderly as she thought of Regina's father, but she immediately chased the warmth of love out of her heart as most improper, and hastened off to fold her husband's clothes or put his books in order, with the proper feeling of repulsion, hatred and disgust to which she was accustomed.

Whether such a state of living and being would really be acceptable to the one who said, Love one another, and Blessed are the pure in heart, she never stopped to ask herself. That she would have been accounted by him the " whitened sepulchre " never occurred to her.

Regina's presence she could not bear, the girl reminded her too vividly of what she was always trying vainly to forget; and so, while her mother busied herself more and more with old women's charities and parochial meetings, Regina was left more and more to her own studies, and for her pleasures to the enchanted garden. The enchanted garden belonged to an unoccupied villa by the sea called " The Chalet." The owner had left it in charge of a caretaker and a gardener, but had begged the Rector to visit both

house and garden occasionally and see that things were kept in good order. The Rector being very busy had gradually allowed this duty to devolve on Regina, who possessed herself of the keys, made friends with the gardener, and undertook to report on the property from time to time to the owner. In this way a great joy had come into her life. She fell in love with the garden at first sight of it, and her visits there soon became a passion of delight to her. In both winter and summer the garden was almost equally beautiful. From its extraordinarily sheltered position no winds could get into it to riot there. Rain and snow to fall upon its velvet ground had to filter through a maze of foliage which neither withered nor fell through all the dizzy circle of the seasons. The garden was sunk slightly below the level of the green, grassy, sheltered and little-frequented road that lay on one side of it, and from which it was screened by masses of tamarisks grown into splendid trees and banks of wild red roses, the tree stems of which were as thick as a man's arm; on the other side of the garden, enclosing all the magic space, was a low stone balustrade, and through its interstices glittered the dancing blue of the sea; over the balustrade, and far above it, towered great aloes, with their spiky leaves, and auricarias, and more red climbing roses, and ever here and there their gentle sprays parted and let through them a vision of the wide sea and the blue and violet lines of distant hills on a far-off coast. In the centre of the garden rose in its stately majesty a single palm, and stretched its benign and glorious branches widely and evenly on every side, catching the rosy light of the dawn, the red glow of the after-

noon and the crimson of the sunset through the procession of the hours ; for the garden lay to the south, and the sun made it his resting-place through all the golden day ; beneath the palm, cool in its shade, lay green turf, emerald-coloured, velvety, wonderful ; and on this without order, except the gracious order of nature, stood at wide intervals standard rose-trees bearing blossoms of every shape and hue — white and amber and cream, red, crimson to blackness, blush-pink like a maiden's cheek, yellow and deep orange — and all of them were scented. Unlike the over-cultivated roses of some rich man's garden, where excessive culture has induced extravagant size at the expense of the flower's natural mystic charm, its perfume, these flowers were all comparatively small, but rich both in colour and fragrance. So sweet was the breath of the roses that for half-a-mile before one reached the garden its divine scent drifted out to the wayfarer and, as in Damascus, the whole air and every breeze whispered of the rose.

To Regina these rose-trees standing on the green grass, not in lines, or rows or circles, not in beds nor borders, seemed less like plants than living figures ; they seemed to her fancy to stand like beautiful girls in a ballroom waiting for their partners to dance with, and the perfume diffused by them in the air seemed like the music of their innocent conversation. She never tired of watching them and noting the graceful attitudes in which they stood, and how sometimes two or three would bend together as if to murmur their confidences.

Round the great oval of the green turf, with its standing roses, ran a narrow path, and this towards

the western end of the garden met other little paths, and these all ran, together or separately, now side by side, now widely diverse through thickets of tamarisk, aloe and rose, under other thick branching palms, where it was so dark at noon under tangled creeper and vine that it seemed like evening; and yet, dark though they were, all these winding, hidden paths led at last out to the porphyry balustrade and the glittering purple sea.

The effect of this garden on *Regina's* artistic, poetic, beauty-loving nature was like magic. However sad or irritated, nervous, ill or angry she might be when she came there, once the gate of the garden was passed a deep peace fell upon her. All here was silence, rest and fragrance; the perfect harmony of light and shade, the mystic presence of beauty; and all her cares and troubles, and the annoyances of the petty world in which she lived, fell from her; her soul seemed to unfurl its wings and soar through radiant spaces, and everything was forgotten but the beauty of the earth and the glory of light and colour and the laugh of the joyous sea.

To the girl lying gazing up at the white clouds this Sunday afternoon the thought of the garden came sweetly, and she got up and shook out the folds of her cambric gown and took the winding path through the Rectory garden which led to the old road to the coast. She had no hat, and through the lace of her white parasol the sun streamed down warmly on her thick and waving hair, hair itself sun-coloured and light-filled, and on the pale rose of her cheeks and the blue of her eyes softly shaded by their curling lashes. Tall, erect and graceful, in the first glow of her

youth, Regina Marlow walked that afternoon with the step and carriage that her name implied. As she walked, she was thinking; she had a small black scholarly-looking book clasped in her hand, but to-day she was not thinking of her studies: her thoughts clustered round an approaching event which was coming to disturb the even discomfort of the Rectory, and which had been the sole topic of conversation at luncheon that day. A friend of the Rector, a junior chum of his in Oxford days, had been invited and was coming to stay at Stossop with them, and Regina wondered very much within herself whether he would be interesting or not. She had heard that he was immensely rich, but that did not interest her at all, though the whole family had nearly fallen into a violent quarrel amongst themselves as to the exact amount of his income and the number of his country houses, much to Regina's amusement, who could not see what it mattered to them whether he were once or three times a millionaire. She had heard that he had travelled a great deal, which attracted her, but chiefly, she understood, for sport, which repelled her. That he was a very brilliant individual, much sought after, courted and fêted in society, impressed her, but only vaguely, since the world of men and their judgments and opinions were very far away from Stossop.

Her query to the Rector as to his appearance had been answered by: "Oh yes; Everest was the best-looking fellow at Oxford," a phrase that left her equally uninformed, since she had no idea what the men at Oxford were like. If they resembled the average individual she saw at Stossop, the Rector's

words would not necessarily mean much. And out of this chaotic non-knowledge of him in her mind, and from the incessant chatter of her sisters about him, a very splendid and glowing vision of the stranger had gradually grown up, and she looked forward to this evening, when he was going to arrive, with a joyous sense of elation and interest which was impersonal in its nature and very different from the anxious, calculating hopes that inspired the rest of the family.

To Regina's intense and secret amusement she saw that her sisters had quite made up their minds that Everest Lanark, his unusual rent-roll and indeterminable number of country houses, should be captured by one or other of them; and the Rector, while professing to be entirely disinterested, really fell in with this idea, while her mother openly exerted herself about the girls' wardrobes, and fussed over their new evening dresses, warning them against burning their complexions, and urging them to practise their drawing-room songs before his arrival. To Regina's keen intelligence the idea that a man of large resources, of wide travel, of immense experience, who had reached the age of forty-six or seven, untouched by all the beauty that, according to all accounts, had always been at his feet, should immediately succumb to the attractions of an ordinary, country girl, without rank, title, wealth or any of those things to which he was accustomed — without talent or charm of any sort except youth and a pretty face — seemed improbable in the extreme.

For her sisters Regina felt that sort of marvelling wonder that the naturally clever and gifted individual

feels for the ordinary person, and which is far greater than any admiring wonder that the limited brain of the ordinary person can conceive for the clever one.

Why did they not do something — and something well — she often asked herself. They did nothing, and wanted to do nothing; they knew nothing, and wanted to know nothing.

To Regina, always learning, always acquiring, always thinking, always doing something, it seemed truly marvellous.

In the Rectory there was a splendid library, full of books in all kinds of languages, treating of all countries, religions and philosophies; yet neither of the elder girls had opened one of them. They hardly realised that any other religion than the Christian existed, barely knew whether the world was round or square, knew no language but their own, had no conception of what was conveyed by the words Roman Empire, and had never heard of Troy. They played a very little on the piano and sung a little less, badly and out of time. They went to church regularly and visited the poor, because their parents insisted on their doing it, in their quality of the Rector's daughters, and Regina often wondered what the "poor" thought of them. The rest of the time they spent reading some novel that dealt exclusively with English life, for they could not understand any other; fashioning and refashioning their costumes, and hoping vaguely for the wealthy individuals they thought they deserved to come to the Rectory and insist on marrying them!

To Regina, who was up with the light of the dawn

to read and study and work, who had absorbed already the learning of a quarter of the library, who had mastered Greek and Latin and read in five modern languages besides, though she had no opportunity of speaking them, who played really well and was endued with a natural gift for painting, the ignorance and apathy of her sisters were beyond understanding.

She did not know that her own splendid health and energy, her capacity for hard work and concentration, her quick and eager mind, all came from that golden source: the passionate love that had formed her being. Had she known the heavy handicap laid upon her sisters at their birth she would have pitied them even more than she did now, and wondered at them less.

By the time she reached the garden the sun was low in the sky and great bars of yellow light fell all across the vivid green amongst the standing roses. She opened and closed the gate very softly, for the birds were singing, and the white doves that belonged to the Chalet were cooing, and she did not want to jar upon the concert. She entered silently, and slowly walked round the winding paths, her whole being lifted up and expanding in the peace and fragrance and beauty of this radiant solitude.

How many afternoons and evenings had she not walked there alone! And now, to-morrow perhaps, she would bring the stranger there to see it. Would he feel the enchantment of it as she did, she wondered, or would he say, as her father had done: "Those roses, you know, *Regina*, ought to be in beds; it's absurd having them all over the place like this."

That should be the test, she thought: if he said

anything like that, or if he suggested that the wild tamarisks should be cut down or thinned out, she would not care about him.

It was a curious fact that, in all her reverie concerning him, it never once occurred to her to picture what his feelings might be for her: she was wholly absorbed in wondering what her feelings might be towards him. So far in her experience with men, and it had not been very wide or deep, she had found them uniformly fall in love with her, and she had grown to accept this, without paying much attention to it, as a common habit of theirs, like smoking.

The doctor had wanted her to marry him and preside over the village dispensary; the curate had wanted her to marry him and manage coal clubs and write his sermons for him all the rest of her life; the Latin master had wanted her to marry him and take his boys' class in Greek verse, and the same master's assistant had wanted her to marry him and run away to London with him; but to all of these *Regina* had said a very gentle No, though her heart had beat at their words and her colour had come and gone uncertainly, for she unconsciously responded to all love as the bell responds to the vibration of the note to which it is attuned.

Regina, naturally, never spoke to anyone of these offers and refusals, but they gradually became known in the village, as everything is always known in an English village. When the grumpy doctor became more surly and grumpy than ever; when the Latin master took to caning his boys every day instead of every week; when the curate came to church whiter than his surplice, with dark rings under his eyes, and

the assistant master went away to town and shot himself in his lodgings there, it was all put down to Regina, and her conduct in having had four proposals was called "disgraceful" by the ladies in the village who had not had one, and were twice and three times her age.

The curate asked her if it was not very miserable for a woman to feel she was making a man unhappy, and Regina had answered very truly: "Yes; but she gets accustomed to it." She could not marry them all, and had she married one the other three would still have been unconsoled. So, when she was being abused and reproached for her heartlessness, she simply went away to the enchanted garden and tried to forget about all of them. Her sisters' strange conceit in themselves prevented them from owing her any ill-will for these events.

They fancied that Regina's lovers did not aspire to them; that, while good enough for her, they would not dare to lift their eyes to the beautiful elder daughters of the Rector, the real fact being that none of the four men would have burdened his life with either of the silly, weakly, useless creatures.

Regina, lying with her cheek pressed to the bright green turf, listened in silence to the wild beating of her heart, as she thought of love. "Surely it must mean more than they think and make of it," she told herself when the memory of these men recurred to her. And she leaned most towards the young master, because he had given up his life for love, but, greatly though his enthusiastic mind had pleased her, his face and figure had not, and she did not regret him.

She would look up to the roses leaning over her and

repeat to them some Greek lines that fascinated her: "Oh, children, what is this that men call love?" And the roses seemed to quiver and bend lower over her to hear the answer: "Love is not love alone, but indeed is known by many names; it is unbridled violence; it is unslaked thirst; it is intolerable anguish; it is unbounded joy; it is endless lamentation," and as a breath stirred in the garden the trees seemed to throw high their blossoms on the scented breeze in a wild and gay response: "Whatever it is, good or ill, we wait for it, worship it, live for it, die for it." This seemed their song to the girl, and the white doves took it up and echoed it, and the thrushes warbled it in their passionate throats, and the nightingales in the dark parts of the garden trilled out in warm melody the same notes: "Wait for it, worship it, live for it, die for it," and the girl heard it, with a wonderful elation and triumph filling her, for she knew that whatever gift the gods might have denied her in this life they had bestowed the supreme one of all — the power to love, and to inspire love. It was this intuitive knowledge of the great power within her, the limitless capacity for devotion, the aptitude for love, that, paradoxical as it may seem, had kept her from love so far.

She knew that somewhere in the world there must be men who possessed beauty and strength and grace and intellect, all that she loved; and one of these would call up in her that same wild elation, that keen rush of adoration, the vivid joy, that she felt under the sky at sunset, when it arrayed itself in its most glorious colours, or in the garden, when the roses poured over her their fragrance, or in Exeter Cathe-

dral, when the roll of melody from the organ seemed to catch up her breathless soul and carry it away to unknown spheres. She felt in fact that need of her being to worship which, in the young and innocent, is the first knowledge of love. And as her reason revolted from worshipping the doctor or the curate or the Latin master or the assistant master, she knew that she did not love, and she would not marry them. For before a clever and well-awakened mind can give itself over to the worship of any object, either that object must be worthy of the worship, or it must so dazzle the senses of the worshipper, throw such a magic glamour around itself, that it appears to be worthy of it; Regina had never seen anyone yet who could capture her reason or dazzle her senses, and now the query came before her, floating hazily, cloud-like on the horizon of her thoughts, would this new-comer to the Rectory bring with him the power of the sunset skies and the cathedral music?

For a whole fortnight nothing had been talked of except the approaching visit. It had engrossed the entire household. The finest bedroom in the Rectory, with a little sitting-room opening out of it, had been assigned to the guest, and to these rooms the occupants of the house had carried their various treasures, sometimes openly, sometimes surreptitiously. Mrs. Marlow had contributed her favourite lounging-chair from her boudoir, Miss Marlow had lent her silver clock, and Miss Violet Marlow her set of silken cushions from her own sofa, and many more pretty and graceful objects had travelled that way for many days, till the family really felt that their guest would be pleased with the little suite, even accustomed as

he was, in their imagination, to be surrounded by tokens of fabulous wealth. Regina that morning had herself placed on the dressing-table as her contribution two lovely roses of perfect shape and hue, in a slender vase of gilded crystal, but Miss Marlow having come in and noticed the divine fragrance filling all the air, and recognising her sister's vase, had seized the golden roses by their heads, torn them out of the water and flung them into the garden, just as Regina was passing underneath. She looked up with a glance of amused irony rather than anger. Such little amenities were not uncommon in the Rectory home.

"You have no business to interfere with his rooms," Miss Marlow called from the window. "We don't want flowers in here, dropping their leaves and making the place untidy."

Regina raised her shoulders a little and passed on in silence, having stooped and gathered up the glorious blossoms, so fresh that they were little hurt by the fall, and they were now blooming in her room. A smile was on her face as she pursued her way. She would wear them that night at dinner and he should admire them on her instead of on his table, that was all.

She walked now from end to end of the garden, thinking of the morrow or the next day, when she would bring him there. All was in perfect order; she had never seen it look more lovely, and she leant at last with a sigh of contentment on the balustrade, gazing across the purple expanse of the sea, to the hazy golden outlines of the distant coast.

How the thrushes sang, till the whole air quivered

about her with melody. And but for love they would never sing at all, and but for love the roses would have no scent, the doves would not coo, the trees would have no blossom and no fruit. What a wonderful gift it is to the world, she thought, this love! — the author of everything pleasing and beautiful, the source of eternal life. No wonder that through all the ages men have worshipped it and sung of it, and poured out all the powers of their brain to magnify it. And yet the never-ending pæan chanted throughout the centuries is but a feeble and inadequate whisper of its greatness. Man's voice being human is not attuned to sing fittingly of what is divine. Men realise that life comes from love, but how many realise that also all the decoration of life comes from it! Even if we could exist without love, with it we must give up the beauty of women, the fragrance of flowers, the melody of birds, the charm of the human voice, the power of the brain.

These are not separate entities, they are simply the effects of the power of love.

A silver clash of bells, softened by distance, came from the church tower across the bay, and slowly, regretfully, Regina took her arm from the balustrade. She could not stay longer in the garden now, but to-morrow!

Through the wonderful golden light of a June afternoon she took her way slowly homeward, across the hay meadows and fields of standing corn, by many little cross cuts that she knew, and arrived at the Rectory about an hour before the time for their guest to arrive. She went straight to her own room to dress; she was saved any embarrassing choice of toil-

ettes, for she had only two, one her best, the other a plain black net, and she would not wear black to receive him. Her sisters had a maid between them, but she never cared for anyone to help her, or to be dependent on anyone for such essential things as dressing and hair-doing. She took out a white dress and laid by it her only jewels — some pearls left her by her grandmother — and the two tea roses. That was all she had to aid her, but *Regina* knew it was enough. She washed her face in the hottest water, so that it came out clear and white, with a warm glow in the cheeks, and then piled up loosely, so that all its natural waves had their full play, the shining masses of her hair. Then the dress over her head by one quick movement and fastened down her bosom, and at the waist, under veils of tulle; the roses slipped in her hair and belt; the pearls clasped round her throat, and she had finished dressing. She was ready, and free to sit down and look at her vision in the glass, which she did.

How bright her eyes were! — they looked like great sapphires; and how red her lips! People might easily think they were painted. The skin, how transparent and soft, like the untouched petal of a white anemone. And her arms, they gleamed, milk-colour, amongst the tulle.

Beyond her window the light was fading in the deep rose of the west; pale violet shadows were stealing up from the copse and enveloping all the garden with the peace of evening. As her glance wandered from her own bright face to the serene outside, a feeling came to her that that day closed a definite period of her life. Eighteen years were now accom-

plished — years of thought, of work, of learning, of contemplation, and they were over. The thought brought no sadness with it, only joy. Whatever the next period of time brought with it, she was ready, eager to go forward, to meet the embrace of life. That it might mean merely the staying on and on at home in Stossop, as it had done for nearly thirty unhappy girls in the village, never occurred to her. Intuitively she knew she would escape from the narrow, cramping existence of her home. It was only the way and the manner of escape that, she felt, was unknown to her.

Full of dominant energy, fear of that way or manner never touched her. Of such are the elect of the world. The poor, ignorant, helpless, wilting mass of Stossop's spinsters is but extravagant Nature's waste material thrown out on the dust-heaps of time.

The light crush of the gravel under carriage wheels came to her ears, footsteps outside her door and on the stairs, voices ascending from the garden. She heard the commotion, and very softly stole out of her room to the oak rail round the well, that went down straight to the hall below, and looked over. The guest was arriving. The footman was bringing in some light luggage. She could see her father and mother both standing there by the door, waiting, and catch a glimpse of her sisters close by the drawing-room door. No one thought of, or noticed, her, and she leant over the balustrade facing the entrance. Then he came in and she saw him. Much as she had expected, much as report had led her to expect, the reality was more than she had ever pictured.

Straight and tall, with a wonderful elegance of figure that not even travelling clothes could conceal, he entered the hall and took off his hat, standing without it as he greeted her parents. Entranced, the girl looked down upon the perfectly shaped head, with its mass of thick black hair, waving a little as it rose from the smooth, wide forehead, on which, to her downward view, the eyebrows seemed extraordinarily dark and striking, the eyes she could not see, but the fine, straight, beautifully carved nose and chin, the turn of the head on the long neck, the line of the cheek, the colour of the skin, a warm, transparent tan, all seemed to the dazzled eyes of the girl to make up a vision of remarkable beauty ; she heard him speaking, and the quiet, well-bred tones came up to her as something totally different from any voice she had ever heard, from the curate's sanctimonious twang, from the doctor's brusque, curt utterances, from the Latin master's guttural pedantry. Musical, even, perfect, like sounds from another world, the waves of air carrying his voice came up to her.

He stood talking, while his valet brought in what seemed to the girl a great deal of yellow hand-luggage and put it down in the hall. Then she saw her mother motion to her sisters, and they came up, looking very beautiful, as *Regina* thought, without a touch of envy. She did not fear their beauty, and merely rejoiced that he should see what presentable sisters she had. *Miss Marlow* was in pale pink satin, against which her brown head, twined round with pearls, contrasted well. *Violet Marlow* wore a dark blue muslin, like the ultramarine of the sea, and her blond hair and snowy skin seemed fair as its

foam. Regina saw the look of interest flash across the man's face as he turned to them; she noted her parents' pride as the presentation was made. Then there was more light talking and laughter, and Regina simply marvelled at the sweetness of her sisters' voices. Was that the same organ as the one with which Jane Marlow had called to her from the window? Was Violet's voice now really the same as the one with which she wrangled and argued over the Rectory dinner-table every night? Then she ceased to notice them, and her ears went back to listening to the man's quiet replies, while her eyes drank and drank of all the grace and wonder of his presence. Then suddenly there was a movement towards the stairs, her parents stood aside, the girls drew back, and Everest, followed by his valet, came upstairs.

Regina, soundless as a white shadow, turned away and went back into her room, softly closing the door. Her eyes were suffused, yet shining like stars on a rainy night; her face was full of colour; her breast rose and fell so rapidly that all her white muslin drapery quivered.

"How wonderful, how delightful he is," she murmured to herself. "It is nice to know there are human beings like that, that they are not all hideous and harsh-voiced, and humpy-backed, and badly dressed as they are in Stossop. He is perfect, and he has come here, and I can love him."

To meet one that you can love; what a privilege that is. She stood for some time thinking over that, lost in the contemplation of that great truth. It is so easy for a woman to find those that will love her, so difficult to find one she can love. For woman being

the superior animal in every way, in beauty, in vitality, in intellect and charm, almost any woman is good enough for a man, whereas there is only one man here and there that is good enough for a woman.

After a pause, she moved over to her long glass and looked at herself. She was quite satisfied. There was nothing more to do, and she threw herself into an easy-chair, and called up that vision of him behind her closed lids as he entered her cordially hated home.

When the gong sounded she went down, and as they were all assembled in the dining-room, and she was the last to enter, all eyes turned upon her as she did so. She hesitated for a moment by the door, and Everest thought, with a sudden startled interest, what an attractive picture she made. Her soft, snow-white draperies fell about a figure tall and slender and supple, harmonious in all its lines as a beautiful melody is in its sounds. Three rows of glistening pearls encircled a round throat, whiter than themselves; above was her pink-tinted face, crowned by its fair clustering hair. But the arresting power was in her eyes; excited, pleased, animated, they were wide open, full of light and fire, and as he rose and approached her they gazed upon him with a sort of rapture.

Her two sisters glanced at her in angry surprise, and then at each other.

Her father got up and presented Everest blandly: "Regina, this is Mr. Everest Lanark. My youngest daughter, Regina."

Everest took a very soft, warm hand in his for a moment, and while he did so, the fragrance of the glorious tea-rose blossoms, one in her hair, another at her breast, came to him; his eyes fell on them, and

always afterwards her image, in his mind, was associated with those golden roses.

A moment later they were all seated at the table: Everest on the right of Mrs. Marlow and next to Miss Marlow, and opposite Miss Violet Marlow and the Rector, Regina at the end of the table, on his side, where he could not well see her, except by bending forward.

She did not care. She was quite content. The dinner went admirably. Everest, pleased at the proximity of so much youthful beauty, and with a really clever if extremely narrow man, in the Rector opposite, to talk to, appeared quite to enjoy it. At its conclusion the four women rose; the men were left together.

Everest did not drink much, but he tried the Rector's old claret; he did not smoke either, but his host did, so Everest took a cigarette with him.

Regina slipped away up to her own room. She was afraid to risk being alone in the drawing-room with her sisters, lest her roses should be torn off, her hair pulled down or her toilette suffer in some way at their hands. Before the Rector they usually kept up some outward seemliness of conduct. So she waited until she heard Everest and her father come out of the dining-room and enter the drawing-room before she descended. She found Everest already seated between her two sisters, and she passed over to a far corner of the room to a low chair by the piano, and sat down there. She thought Everest would not be the man she felt sure he was if he could stand long the united conversational powers of Jane and Violet Marlow.

Little scraps of their talk came over to her and amused her: "strips of flannel," "had to keep her bed for a week, and mother took her guava jelly every day." Regina guessed that Everest was being entertained with an account of some of Stossop's sick poor.

He glanced her way many times, and she fancied a weary look grew upon his face, as the poor continued very sick, and Miss Marlow's methods of treating their various ailments became more and more detailed. Neither sister allowed the conversation to pause for a moment, and when one showed signs of failing the other took it up with commendable energy. But few things in this world prevented Everest from doing what he wanted to do, and certainly two country girls talking to him was not one of them. He wanted to approach Regina and speak to her, and as he found the sisters would not stop their chatter he rose in the middle of it.

"I want to speak to your sister for a moment," he said merely, and left them, crossing the room to where Regina sat, and drawing an easy-chair close to hers. She looked up, and the same enthusiastic welcome shone in her eyes as on his presentation.

"What were you doing all day?" he asked, letting his eyes rest on the youthful fairness of the throat, where the pearls gleamed in the lamplight. He felt quite confident he would not be bored with the Stossop poor in this quarter.

"I went to church in the morning, which I hate, and which always makes me realise what wretched things all these religions are. Then after lunch I lay for quite a long time in the garden, gazing at the white

nimbi in the sky. That helps a little to counteract the effect of the church service. Then I walked to the sea, and visited a rose garden there. It is perfectly beautiful — it has a magic I cannot explain; you must come and see it yourself. I looked over all the roses, and then I sat down and read till the sunset came and disturbed me. I had to look at that, and then I walked home to dress for dinner."

She spoke lightly, easily, her warm, ardent gaze on his face, her soft lips smiling. Her tones were like music. Her way of talking quite different from the heavy, assiduous speechifying of her sisters.

"What were you reading?" he asked, his eyes fixed on the brilliant, changing, responsive countenance.

"I was finishing the *Cyclops*: it is not a good play, but I have read all Euripides except that, and I wanted to complete him."

She spoke quite simply, and without any affectation or desire to impress him. Things one does oneself rarely seem very great accomplishments to oneself, and Regina had read Greek for so long that a new play seemed no more than a new novel to her.

"Do you read it in the original?" Everest asked, raising the dark arches of his brows, and to the girl, as she met his admiring gaze from under them, it seemed as if he were lifting her heart out of her bosom with them.

She laughed. "Yes, I don't like translations at all. Ever since I saw that Byron had translated Catullus' Ode to *Juventus* as an Ode to 'Eleanor' I have fled from all of them."

"You seem to be tremendously clever!"

“Am I?” she asked, smiling up at him. “I am so glad you think so. I am very fond of learning and all the arts. Are you? Painting, music, poetry, sculpture. They are the soul of life, I think. What should we do without them? Think if we had only in life the Church, dusters and the poor!”

Everest laughed, and so did she. “It does sound an awful combination! Yes, I think with you art is the one thing that brings a little heaven on earth. It is the only true religion, the only true elevator of that poor wretch — man. I am never so happy, and I never feel so good and so charitable, as when I am painting.”

“Do you paint?” asked Regina, with a fiery interest in her glowing eyes. “So do I. What are your subjects, and what do you paint in? — water colours or oil?”

“Oils. I do anything that catches my fancy — a head, a figure, a landscape, anything that is a little unusual. I hate the commonplace.”

“In Africa I suppose you found so many subjects that were unusual: tropical trees and wonderful plants and beautiful black women.”

Everest looked back at the delicately coloured face, of which her interest and excitement made the skin glow more transparently every minute.

“You have great intuition to feel that the women are beautiful,” he answered; “most people just group them all together under the name of blacks, and are so blind mentally and physically as not to be able to see their beauty. There is a race in the Soudan, of which the beauty could not be surpassed. The colour is coal-black, but form and line are per-

fect, both in face and body. Then another race has absolutely perfect forms, though the face is of the negro type. Never anywhere else could one see more gloriously modelled shoulders and arms than those women have."

At that moment the footman brought in coffee, and while they were taking it the Rector came up, and the talk became general.

Soon after Everest rose, with the excuse that he must not disturb their early country hours, and said "Good-night." Regina, watching him as he got up and stood, felt an electric wave of pleasure pass through her from head to foot. The well-cut and fitting evening clothes displayed all the admirable lines of his figure. The slimness and the grace of it were a revelation to her. The light from the centre swinging lamp, falling on the pale well-bred face, showed its perfection of carving, its look of power and intellect. As he said good-night to her, she gazed upon him, wide-eyed and in silence, and Everest, reading her thoughts, felt amused and pleased.

When he reached his rooms he turned the key in the lock and then threw himself into the arm-chair by the open window. The soft air of the June night came in, full of fragrance, from the Rectory garden. In the copse beyond, the nightingales here and there burst into little trills and long calls, and then were silent again, preparing for their unbroken, tireless melody of the later hours. Everest sat very still in his chair, one hand hanging idly over its arm, his even brows contracted, thinking. Before coming down to the Rectory he had made up his mind very decidedly that he would not allow this visit to draw him into any

complicated ties with the daughters of the house. Marriage was far from his wishes or plans at that moment, and any relations with anybody almost equally distasteful, since they would rob him of that peace of mind and rest which his doctor had told him were essential, and which he had come to the country rectory to find. He had heard that the Misses Marlow were handsome girls of the ordinary type, and the ordinary type, he knew, had no attraction for him. Certainly after the conversation of the evening, he was convinced of his perfect safety with either Jane or Violet. But Regina; at the first meeting of the eyes, at the sight of that sweet enthusiasm of admiring welcome in hers, at the touch of her hand, full of electric fire, he had realised instantly that there was every danger here. And so strongly did this feeling envelop him again when they said good-night that he felt inclined, now, to summon his valet, and tell him to repack everything for a return journey on the morrow. But the thought of the surprise, the disappointment, the hurt feeling he would occasion checked him.

His gaze wandered round his apartment. His quick eyes told him at once how much personal care and pains had been bestowed on the room, to give it the particular air of welcoming comfort it possessed.

It was not the hands of servants that had looped up so gracefully with bows of lilac ribbon the curtains of his bed, nor arranged all those books of reference and the latest weekly papers on his writing-table.

He took up idly the silver pen, put ready in the ink-stand tray, and saw it had "Violet" engraved upon it, and a handsome leather blotting-book, filled with

every writing necessity, even to stamps of many denominations, bore its owner's monogram, "J. M."

These things spoke to him, though many men might not have even noticed them, and many others only noticed them to jeer. How kindly old John Marlow had received him; and his wife — what pains she had taken probably in thinking out that excellent dinner they had given him, and the girls were all so pretty and fresh and eager to please.

It would go against the grain of Everest's nature to wound them all by suddenly leaving. Whatever excuses he made, they would still believe his departure was due to some error of their own. But an intuitive voice within him warned him that if the Devon coast was just the place to eradicate the traces of African fever, from which he was suffering, Stossop Rectory and Regina were not the best adjuncts to it.

As he sat there, undecided, in the silence, the soft sound of a casement above his own being set open came to him, and without any particular intent or reason in his mind he rose and went to his own window and looked out. The moon had just climbed above the copse, and sent a warm, pale light across the sleeping garden. Everest looked up, and there above him was the girl who was in his thoughts. She had opened her window, apparently to look at the night, for her face was turned towards the rising moon, and, quite unconscious, seemingly, of any spectator, she leaned a little forward. Of her face Everest could see nothing except the under part of her chin, but the light fell full on the round column of her neck, upon the white expanse of her bosom, upon the perfect arms supporting her, as her hands clasped the sill. Its pale radi-

ance invested the dazzling whiteness of the skin with a peculiar and mystic brilliance, and, accustomed though he was to women's beauty in any and every form, Everest drew in his breath sharply with surprised admiration. She had taken off her evening dress, and the low bodice she now wore possessed only two narrow straps holding it to the shoulders, and passed below the snowy swell of the breast, leaving it and the soft modelling of the arms and shoulders all revealed. Yet the silver light, falling down and over and round her, seemed to clothe her in shining armour. To any man, even to the most material, it must have seemed a vision more of heaven than of earth, and to Everest, with his artist's eye and mind, the sight had a magic and a charm he could hardly define to himself. Silent, almost breathless, he stood watching her, as silent and absorbed she herself stood watching the moon slowly mount in the purple sky.

Then suddenly she turned her head and looked down, why, Everest could not tell, since he had made no sound. For one instant their eyes met. He saw the beautiful arms bend at the elbows, with the change of position; the face, a dark oval now, as it turned downwards, hung over his; he saw the silver light illuminate all the masses of the fair hair round it, for one second, that leapt by him into eternity all too quickly; then she vanished noiselessly. The casement remained open, but the light fell now only on its glittering panes. For a long time the man waited by the window, his heart beating hard, but she did not come back, and at last he turned away to his room and commenced his undressing. The nightingales, perfectly attuned, now began to pour out in the still-

ness the raptures of their song. Everest's face was dark as he moved about the room.

All resolve, all desire to go on the morrow had left him. A new and a stronger one was waking in his veins.

He turned down the lamp burning beneath its pretty, rose-coloured shade and got into the bed, so carefully prepared for him, with lace-edged sheet and silken coverings.

As he laid his head down on the pillow trimmed by Miss Marlow's own hands a murmur passed his lips:

“ Well, I'll stay, and risk it.”

CHAPTER II

IN THE WAYS OF DELIGHT

THE next morning Everest, after a troubled and restless night, found himself the first in the breakfast-room, and when the door opened it was Regina who came in. She was dressed in a morning cotton of rose-colour, and either by contrast to that, or from emotion, her face looked pale as their eyes met and he took her hand in his.

“ You were all in silver armour last night when I saw you,” he said gently, “ like an image of Diana.” The colour came then in soft waves to her cheeks and beat there; her gaze seemed locked in his and could not get away.

“ Diana was a horrid and cruel divinity, I like her least of any of them; Venus was kinder,” she murmured.

“ Well, you must be Venus to me,” returned Everest, smiling down upon her; his face had a gentle, tender expression, the tones of his voice were very soft, and the girl’s heart beat to suffocation as she heard them.

She could not answer. Just then the door opened and the Rector, with the entire family group behind him, appeared in the doorway. Everest and Regina moved a little apart, their hands, which had remained in each other’s, fell to their sides. Everest moved forward to greet his host.

"Glad to see you are an early riser," remarked the Rector genially. "Did you sleep well?"

"No, I can't say I did, there are so many disturbing influences in the country: nightingales and church clocks and all sorts of things; then when I did go to sleep I dreamt, which I never do in town."

"What did you dream about?" asked Jane Marlow. She looked very pretty this morning in a fresh white cambric, with a green ribbon round her slim throat.

"Of silver images," replied Everest, and his eyes went to *Regina*, who stood by her place at the table. She looked down as she heard these words; a tremor went through her whole frame.

"How funny dreams are, they never seem to correspond to anything one has seen or done in the day, do they?" replied Jane, and Everest answered calmly, "Hardly ever."

The coffee was brought in and they all closed round the table while the Rector began to say grace.

Breakfast was generally a most unpleasant meal at the Rectory. From the last word of the long grace at the beginning, to the first word of the long grace at the end, it was a series of surly, grumbling wrangles, in which everyone showed their early-morning ill-humour to the utmost. Mrs. Marlow, according to the Rector, had always done something wrong: either she was late, or she had had the coffee made too weak, or too strong, or the housemaid had not called him early enough, or too early, or his bath was cold. Mrs. Marlow generally argued out the respective points, until she was clearly proved in the right, or at least her husband was reduced to an ex-

hausted silence. Then the two sisters had various complaints to make, or else the continuation of some personal quarrel begun upstairs absorbed them.

Regina, for herself, took no part in either the grace or the wrangling. To her the first seemed rendered ludicrous by the Rector gabbling over it, in a tremendous hurry, that he might begin abusing his wife; and further, if the Creator gave them their breakfast, He presumably gave them everything else, and of His gifts she would not certainly have picked out this detestable breakfast to thank Him for. She would sooner have thanked Him, sitting before her easel in solitude: "For what I am about to paint," for the powers He had given her, than for what she was about to eat in hostility at the table.

She used to sit quite silent, while the waves of querulous, complaining or angry voices rose and fell round her, and when she had finished her meal, which she naturally did long before the others, since so much disputing takes time, she would sit looking through the window, watching the robins at their singing matches on the lawn, and longing to be away with her painting or music, her Latin or Greek, or in the enchanted garden, out of earshot at least of her amiable family and their incessant discussion of things that to her view mattered so little.

She wondered to-day how the meal would go, because she believed they were not bad-mannered enough to quarrel before a guest, and she was astonished to find that the conversation, as a matter of fact, was kept up entirely between her and Everest. For the latter, with a strenuous resolve to ban the sick poor at breakfast, steered away from Miss

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Marlow's opening remarks on almshouses, and plunged resolutely into the heart of Africa, continuing the conversation with Regina which had been interrupted last night.

Regina had read much on Africa, and followed the history of many explorers through Uganda, and wandered with many authors in the pigmy forests and by the Great Lakes. Consequently, although she made some mistakes, she had a good general knowledge of the subject, and her eager enthusiasm, her perfect attention, her quick comprehension, made her a naturally good and easy talker on any subject.

As the rest of the family knew absolutely nothing about Africa, except, as regards the Rector, that it was a country "full of black heathen," as regards the mother, "that it was a swampy, unhealthy place, where there were snakes and one got fever and things," and as regards the sisters, that it was one of the places where "missions were sent to cannibals," they remained out of the conversation and sat silent, listening in wonder to the brilliant talk flying across the table, much of which they could barely comprehend.

After breakfast, when they had all risen, the Rector claimed Everest to go with him to see his model cottages, recently erected in the village, and Everest, grateful for having escaped the sick poor at breakfast, felt it his duty to put up with some poor now, since his host wished it, and consented pleasantly.

"What are we going to do this afternoon?" he asked.

He put the question in a general way, but his eyes

sought Regina, who turned hers aside with a singing gladness in her heart.

Miss Marlow answered him:

“We are going to drive you over to Lady Delamere’s for tea — we start from here about three.”

“I’ll join you outside, Everest,” called the Rector from the door. “I have to look into my study for half-a-minute.”

Everest nodded and went up to his own room for his hat. Coming down he met Regina alone, on the stairs, and paused.

“You are coming this afternoon?” he asked.

She was by a long window, through which the sun fell on her. Her face looked just like a rose, in its pink and white colour, as she lifted it towards him, standing two or three steps above her.

“No,” she answered, smiling, “mother and Jane and Violet are going, and the carriage holds only four comfortably.”

“You and I could walk?” suggested Everest promptly.

Regina laughed outright as the picture of her sisters’ faces came before her, as they would look if, when the carriage was starting, Everest left his seat to walk with her.

“Oh, no,” she said; “we could not do that. My sisters have set their hearts on taking you with them to the Delameres’.”

“Well, where are you going then?” he asked.

“I shall go, I think, to the enchanted garden — it is such a lovely day.”

“How nice that sounds! The enchanted garden! I wish I were coming there too.”

“Why do you wish it?”

“I don’t know. One cannot always trace the birth and growth of one’s desires.” Regina gazed at him as he stood there, one hand on the banister rail, thinking how truly wonderful he was in his difference from all the other men she had ever seen. The crowded country church on Sundays, what a mass of more or less ungainly, shambling, shuffling figures it contained, representatives of the middle-aged or old inhabitants; and the young men seen on the cricket and football ground, how fat and round and stodgy they looked, or else how thin and weedy, leaning over, as it were, the hollow of their own chests!

But here in Everest’s case how all was changed! It was difficult to say whether the strength or grace of his figure left the greater impression on the eye, so perfectly were the two united in it. It was a form beautifully planned out by Nature, which the ceaseless activity of its owner had enhanced. It suggested potential energy; the balance and the poise of it, whether in action or repose, were always perfect. It had that curious symmetry, that look of its perfect adaptability to every possible movement, that one sees in the wild animal while at the height of its beauty and power. To Regina’s mind came, as she looked at him, the thought of the slim and graceful fox, treading deftly with its sure, trim feet the edge of the covert, with all that tremendous power of swift, enduring speed locked in its beautiful, sinuous body. And again the red deer of Exmoor occurred to her, with their splendid carriage, their proud beauty of line, their clean-cut elegance of form.

Everest was forty-six, but so lightly had the feet

of the years touched him in their flight over him that he looked hardly more than twenty-eight or twenty-nine. His hair had not a single white strand in it, nor had the dark moustache that flowed in a straight line across his face, not pulled downwards nor twisted up, and of which some of the threads glowed with a red-gold sheen on their blackness, if the sun struck across them. Very few lines marked the clear, warm tan of the skin; the teeth were even, perfect, untouched by dentistry. Life and experience had added power and intellect to the face, had deepened the mental charm without, as yet, taking from its physical beauty. Out of the beautiful youth he had been at eighteen, Nature had built up through all these years one of her masterpieces, and it seemed that she was so pleased with it, now that it had reached its perfection, that even she, fidget though she is, always doing and undoing, was loath to begin her task of pulling it all to pieces.

Regina gazed and gazed upon him in silence that was thrilled through and through with joy, for to the artist there is no delight more keen than looking on what is beautiful and perfect, and Everest asked her with a little smile of what she was thinking.

“Of an Exmoor deer that I saw standing, once, on a little tor at sunrise, surveying the sleeping moor,” she said slowly and in a low tone, and then went on up the stairs, as she heard doors shutting, and steps approaching from below.

Everest passed on down. The beautiful imagery of her words won his quick, artistic sense, and, little conceited as he was, the flattery from the fresh, girlish lips pleased him. He went on, feeling well able

to grapple even with the model cottages and the sick poor.

Regina in her room could do nothing; she tried to read, but she only heard his voice speaking; she turned to the paintings, but she hardly saw them: his face hung before her. Finally she descended to the drawing-room and sought to play, but her hands dropped from the keyboard, and she sat silent, gazing before her.

So, she remembered, had she felt once before in her life, when Nature's voice first called to her to leave her dolls and playthings and begin to prepare herself for her life's work.

How well she remembered that day, when first the scales of childhood had fallen from her eyes, and her dolls, formerly living things, had been seen for the first time as they were: bits of rag and wood and stone. How she remembered the keen wonder she had felt, the astonishment that she could play no more!

Then had come the period of fierce intelligence, the appetite and desire for work, the longing to know and to expand the brain. For since Nature has made woman to be not only the mother but the nurse of the child, and it is the mother's brain and not the father's that is transmitted to the child, she gives to the female, with the first development of sex, this sharp desire for knowledge, for learning, for mental endowment, so that it may be duly passed on to the offspring. Hence that overwhelming thirst for mental work, for study, which is so common in the developing girl for these few years in her life, so unusual in the male, who rarely learns, except for ma-

terial and worldly considerations. And as Nature's voice had peremptorily called her from her playthings, and forced her to her studies, so now, her time for study being over, Nature again summoned her to leave her accomplished duties, and prepare herself for the new ones in store for her.

Nature was strong in *Regina*; she was its child. The cramped artifices of civilisation had not got hold of her and stifled out of her the breath of Nature. So after a time she abandoned all work, finding it impossible, and sat gazing out of the window, thinking.

At luncheon, *Everest*, having quite made up his mind as to his afternoon's programme, which was to include other items besides the *Delamere* call, took comparatively little notice of *Regina*, and talked chiefly to the Rector on model cottages, and their morning's inspection.

The Rector delightedly expounded his views, which seemed to *Everest* to have for their aim the increasing dependence of the poor upon the rich, the incompetent upon the capable, the weak and idle upon the strong and industrious, and the undermining of what thrift the poor possessed by removing the urgent necessity for it.

The model cottages were to be practically free, with only a nominal rent; old people were to be kept by the parish; sick people were to be tended gratis; young people were to be encouraged to marry early and bring into the world large families for their neighbours to keep; chance immorality was to be avoided at all costs, and punished mercilessly; large broods of infants, no matter from what drunken,

vicious, idle parents, were to be favoured and cared for out of the money of the honest and sober, provided only the brood was born in wedlock, and the father and mother had the sanction of the Church.

Finally he gleefully totted up the subscriptions he had dragged out of the unwilling hands of the hard-working and thrifty portion of the villagers, for his doors, his windows, his model baths, his new sinks, and only lamented that he was still short a hundred pounds for finishing the hearths.

Everest, to whom this exposition of views had been intensely repellent, felt relieved that the point of asking for charity, up to which he felt sure the Rector was slowly working, had been reached at last, and said immediately:

“ Oh, well, you must count on me for the remaining hundred for the fireplaces. I will give you the cheque after luncheon.”

The Rector flushed with pleasure. How convincing his arguments had been!

“ My dear Everest, it’s most good of you. I assure you it will take a load off my mind. I really feel ashamed to go and beg any more from my parishioners, though I must say, hard pressed for money as they are, and hard as they have to work for it, they seldom refuse me.”

Regina, sitting opposite them both, and watching the pale, severe gravity that had come over the handsome countenance, knew that Everest was giving that hundred, not because he cared whether the very unmodel cottagers in their model cottages had hearths or not, nor whether the tribes of sickly infants that they had no right to bring into the world at all,

since they could not keep them, were warmed by his fires or not, but simply because it was Regina's father who asked him, and because Regina herself sat opposite him, and another link was looped up in that golden chain that was slowly forging in life's furnace to bind her to him.

"All the same you know I don't think you are right, John," Everest answered easily, in his light, polished tones. "You think you are alleviating poverty, but in reality you are creating it. The dread of dying in the workhouse when they are old is the only stimulus to a great many to work at all while they are young; take that away, and put old vagabonds in free model cottages, what inducement do you give to the young vagabond to work? And what reward have you for the honest, sober hard worker if you take his savings to help keep his idle and drunken brother? It seems to me you actually put a premium on idleness and vice, and rob honesty and virtue to do it. Then as regards your idea of morality, I think that the poor, hard-working, healthy girl, who, without marriage, brings one healthy child into the world, and works all her life to keep it, as many of them do, is a less deadly enemy to society than those wretched, improvident couples who rush into marriage and keep producing more and more unfit humanity, for which there is no use, and which other people at their own self-sacrifice have to support."

The Rector's large face gradually grew purple as he listened; he was a very heavy eater and drinker, and all his superabundant blood went up to his head in boiling wrath if anyone attacked his particular and

exceedingly narrow outlook upon sexual subjects. Here, he had to choke down his feelings as best he could, for he would not, on any account, quarrel with Everest. Moreover the cheque was promised but not yet written. He cleared his throat many times, and nervously broke up the toast crusts lying at his left hand, before replying.

“I know your views are peculiar,” he said at last; “they were at Oxford; I am afraid you hardly give due importance to the Sacraments of the Church. Er . . . have we all finished? Then let us say grace.”

Everest’s eyes met Regina’s and a little flash passed between them, an instant’s glance that was very dear to them both. She loved him for every word he had uttered, and Everest knew that his views were hers, by the glad eager look on her face as she listened to him.

He knew each time he sat down to the table that his host was opposed to him in every opinion, and that the others had no opinions at all. It was only Regina, with her quick, active mentality, her rapid perceptions, that was with him, on every subject, and somehow the knowledge seemed very sweet to him, and to draw them very closely together.

Luncheon over, the elder girls went up to change their toilettes, and Everest and Regina stepped through the long windows out upon the lawn. It was a wonderful day. After a cold and stormy spring, summer had come in with that perfect glory, that golden radiance, that rescue England’s reputation from entire ruin.

The sky, of the palest, most delicate blue, showed

tiny dapplings of pearly white against its sapphire clearness; all the air seemed dancing with a golden sheen, and in it seemed to hang, like a canopy, the scent of flowers, of the pink and white snow of the May not yet over, of the laburnum already in blossom.

"What a heavenly day!" Everest exclaimed. "I wish you were coming with us this afternoon."

"So do I, as you are going," she answered, looking up at him, delighting in the sensation of walking beside him and seeing that dark brilliant face above her. "But I know my sisters will like it best as it is. I shall go to the garden and think about you instead."

"Of me? A poor subject, I am afraid. You were better off with the *Cyclops*."

"I can't get interested in it now. Do you know, I tried everything this morning: Greek and Latin and painting, and I tried to play; it was all no good. I had to just sit still and think about you."

Everest looked at her, but she met his gaze quite openly and simply. Her eyes were innocent, frank, ingenuous. There seemed no design on her part to flatter him. She merely appeared to feel no necessity for concealing what she thought. She admired him and said so, she thought about him and said so. That was all. There was none of the veiled would-be seduction of the women he was accustomed to.

Praise and adulation so absolutely transparent, so obviously honest, has an irresistible power. It ceases to be flattery; it becomes homage, and has its effect on the recipient, as incense has upon the senses.

"I shall be sorry if my coming here has inter-

rupted your work and lessened your powers," he answered, and his voice had grown suddenly so sad and grave that *Regina* exclaimed:

"Oh, never be sorry for me that you have come! If you knew how perfectly happy I am. Your visit here and your companionship is to me just as if the sun or moon had come down to walk about with me."

Everest laughed outright.

"Either might be a most dangerous companion, it seems to me," he answered, and *Regina* laughed with him.

"But think of the honour and the experience, the novelty, the joy of it! It would be well worth being burned alive for, I think!"

Everest did not answer for a moment. His laugh died away, and she thought his face looked pale and grave in the sunlight. Just then the Rector's voice came to them calling *Everest*, and *Regina* drew away towards the copse.

"Good-bye, then. I am going to the garden. I hope you will enjoy your afternoon." And as he turned back to his host, she disappeared in the soft green shadows of the wood.

She walked quickly, and could have well run or danced, she felt so full of life and joy; the breeze was soft, it came to her cheek like a caress. The wood seemed full of music; small birds were warbling in it everywhere and calling to each other across the leafy screen of green; the leaves themselves quivered and rustled and murmured in the warm and scented air.

Regina for the past few years had been happy in the knowledge of her youth and power to please, and

now that love had come to her also, it seemed as if her heart, her whole system, could not contain her delight. For she knew within herself that though nothing had been said, and though his acquaintance with her could be measured by hours, Everest was going to love her just as the doctor and the master and the assistant master and the curate had done. There was the same curious softening of all his face when he looked at her as she had seen in theirs, the same velvet edge to his tones when he spoke to her, as she had heard from them. And while their love was useless to her, because she could not return it, for this man she felt she could, and was ready to feel a passionate adoration, to pour out her life in love for him, and so know the supreme happiness that Nature holds in this life for a woman. To be loved is nothing, to love is something, to love and be loved is everything. Critical and sensitive about every point in another, as she was, so that the least deviation from her standard of beauty or intellect would have spoiled the perfection of her feeling, she could find nothing wanting in Everest; in all her dearest dreams and visions no ideal had ever been invested with greater charm than the living man now had for her. And it seemed to her like a miracle in her favour that, of all the men that might have come to her home, he had been the one to do so.

To be merely in the same room with him, to see and hear him talking to another, to study him as he leant back in an arm-chair, reading, and watch the slender brown hand, that she knew had such power, hold a book or newspaper, seemed to make her whole being vibrate with delight; and he admired her, won-

dered at her, liked to match his learning and his talk with her, was interested in, sought her; soon, she knew, he would desire and love her. And the price of it all? What would it be? Her feet, that had been dancing so merrily over the green moss, stopped suddenly; a trembling seized all her limbs and a chill came over her in the soft sunny air. She sank on an old log, by the winding path, both hands pressed over her heart to still its beating. In these moments she knew, whatever the price, she must pay it.

When the time came for him to ask anything from her, she must give it. She knew beforehand she could not resist him, could not refuse or deny to this man anything, because of the glorious pleasure of the giving, pleasure that would compensate her for everything, for life itself, if won. . . .

She was very pale as she sat there and shivered, for love is absolutely merciless and inexorable, and counts out its moments of supreme delight against the drops of its victim's life-blood, and she knew this. All in a moment, in the midst of her happy triumph, the thought of his wealth and position, so far above her own in its powers and possibilities, had reared itself up in her mind, like a great wall towering over her, menacing to crush her. She hated it; it separated him from her. If he had only been poor, like the young master, who had had nothing but his life, which he had laid down at her feet! How perfect then her happiness might have been! The meanest, commonest existence, shared with Everest, would have been as if it were wrapped in cloth of gold to her. Tiny rooms, poor living, hard working, what would she have cared? Had he said: "Marry me and

come to a lonely tent in the burning Soudan," she would have said: "Yes," oh, how gladly! As she would have said it had he asked her to marry him and share a prison, or hell itself. But some instinct told her that Everest would not want to marry her, that a man with that accumulated wealth and vast inheritance would not enter marriage merely for the sake of passion; that he would need other conditions, which she vaguely felt she did not fill.

And even if in the blindness of love he offered it, would it be her part, would it be right to accept it?

Suppose in the awakening, after, from that blinding dream that passion is, she saw that he regretted?

How it would rend her, heart and soul, to think that she, who would cast down her life like a mantle, for him to walk over, did he wish it, had brought him a burden of regret!

The thought hurt and stung her; it bit deeply into her brain. She rose and hurried on with quick steps to the garden, as if seeking its protection from these thoughts, that pursued her like living things.

Whatever happened, she thought, she would be content as long as no suffering through her fell on him. Nothing would she take, nothing would she accept from him, that meant loss or sacrifice to himself. On that she was quite resolved.

To a woman's passion is always added the wonderful instinct of maternal love. In all its wildness, in all its demands, there is still that guiding, underlying impulse to shield, to protect, to guard, to encircle with tender care the man she loves, and in Regina, now that she loved, this instinct rose to its full strength, and pervaded all her heart and soul. She

herself and all that happened to her was of no moment. At all costs Everest was to be considered; his happiness kept safe and sacred in her hands.

Her quick walking soon brought her to the garden and the sea. As she unlocked the gate she noticed how the summer heat of the last twenty-four hours had called the laburnum into bloom. The whole garden glowed golden with it! On every side it gleamed and shone like amber rain, falling amongst the other foliage. Never had she seen it look so beautiful in its contrast with the pale blue of the sky, never had the rich yellow tint of it been so perfect. Rejoiced, she walked round all the narrow winding paths. She longed to show the garden to Everest, and it seemed as if it had arrayed itself in its most radiant and glorious dress in honour of his coming.

The standard rose-trees made of the centre a mass of vivid colour; the May was all in bloom, and the wild tamarisk threw up against the azure light a perfect foam of pink blossom. The perfumes from all the different flowering plants and trees floated mingling in the still and sheltered air like the strains of melody, wandering through and interwoven in a musical harmony; and the hum of the happy bees, the call of the nesting birds, the coo of the doves, rose and fell sweetly above the low murmur and ripple of the sea. Anxious and foreboding thoughts slipped from her mind; as always here, she relapsed joyously into reflecting simply upon Everest, upon his personality that so called to her own, upon the delight of his having come there, and all that wonder and rapture lying hidden in the heart of life to which her eyes were being opened.

She found her way to a little rustic seat beneath the palm at last, and there sat down, amongst the maze of roses, only wanting one thing to complete her happiness — his presence there.

The hot hours of the noonday went softly past, and the day hastened to array itself in fresh beauty to meet the sunset; the light began to deepen, the sky to flush with rose, the air to grow heavier with fragrance.

Those birds that were still singing, not yet exhausted by their nesting cares, gave out their last floods of melody before the approach of evening.

Suddenly as she sat there she heard a step on the gravel, and started. This was her sacred ground; no one had a right to come there; but she guessed whose step that was, firm and light and springing like the tread of a deer.

She sprang up, her heart leaping with joy, and through the drooping, swaying palm branches saw the slim figure she expected approaching, and the light falling sideways across the dark and handsome face.

She went forward to meet him, making no effort to conceal the joy and pleasure shining in her eyes.

“How lovely this is! I am so glad you have come! How did you get in?”

“By the gate.”

“But I locked it.”

Everest laughed. “Locked gates are nothing to me. I jumped over it!”

“How splendid!” she said, gazing at him, her soft azure eyes full of admiration. “That high, spike-

topped gate! I wish I had seen you. And how did you get here? How did you find the garden?"

"I walked here from the Delameres'."

"Walked! It's fifteen miles to their house."

"Well, what is fifteen miles?" he answered, smiling down into her upraised face. "Nothing, after fifty miles a day of cross country, as I have often had to do; and as to finding you, in comparison with the interior of Africa, Stossop's geography is pretty easy."

"How wonderful you are," she said softly, "and I am so glad you are here. I wanted to show you my garden. What do you think of it?"

"It is a beautiful place. It seems like those magic gardens one reads of. One can't believe it's just ordinary England."

"It is perfect to me now you are here. I was wishing so much for you to come."

"It must have been that which drew me here to you — darling."

He had not meant to use that word, nor any endearing term, but it passed his lips almost unconsciously; she did look such a darling in her pretty summer dress, with her fresh, pink-tinted face all aglow with her ardent, enthusiastic welcome of himself. And he knew, as he looked at the lovely, youthful form, that there was the spirit of a lioness within. She was a thing of life and light and fire; full to the brim, like himself, of ardent energy and power. There was no doll-like, sawdust body here, with brains of wool, as many of the women had had whom he had known, lovely though their outsides had been.

She attracted him violently, irrepressibly; there was an all-compelling magnet in each slender finger, as he touched her hand.

Nature does not take long in setting up her wondrous all but unbreakable current of electricity when she has brought together two individuals suitable to mate with each other, and just like that other common form of electricity which holds the hands relentlessly to a battery so that their owner has no power to lift or stir a finger, so does this other magnetic current sweep round its two captives, binding them together without will or power to move asunder.

At the word "darling" a quiver passed over Regina's face and she looked away as if she had not heard.

It is the part of virginity to flee from passion, and instinctively it fulfils its part as long as passion pursues. If there is any pause in the chase, virginity kindly stops and waits, till passion is ready to take up the pursuit, when it promptly flies again.

So Regina, with her pulses leaping with joy and her feet on air, and seeing the garden about her, all transfigured with a new glory, at the sound of that word in his voice looked away instinctively and seemed not to have heard.

They walked round the green turf, the roses nodding in the gently moving air and throwing their perfume on to it, under the thick wild unpruned tamarisk, that looked like the softest feathers against the glowing sky, under the swaying palms that threw shadow and sunlight alternatively down on them, and then on by those little dark green winding paths where the air was still and warm and dusk laden with the scent

of the rose and the vital life-giving salt breath of the sea.

They spoke a little, mostly in praise of the beauty around them, or of the doves flying in circles overhead, or of the wild calling note of the nightingale that came from the thickets, and both were intensely happy in the beauty and proximity of the other and because of the magic steel-like ring that nature was drawing tighter and tighter round them, each moment forcing them towards each other.

As last, before them, through the crossing and re-crossing of delicate lines of branch and leaf, they saw the gleam of purple and the glitter of the sea. Regina quickened her steps a little and reached first the porphyry balustrade and leant over with a little cry of delight as her eyes caught all the radiance gathering in the western sky and all the jewelled light flung on the opposite coast, where peak and headland lay in lines of velvet blue under a golden haze.

“Oh, look how lovely this is,” she said, as Everest came and stood beside her. “I have a painting of it that I did on an evening like this. I should like to show it to you.”

“Did you paint this?” he said. “It is a difficult subject. What a lot you have learnt in your few short years of life! You seem to know so much, and then to be only eighteen; you are a revelation to me.”

A little smile played over her face, irradiated by the mellowing light as she looked up at him.

“I am so glad,” she said simply. “I should like to please you. To me you are the most wonderful, beautiful and perfect person I have ever seen.”

“Regina.” He was very near her now, one arm

came round her shoulder. Ah, that touch, how it moved her, the first touch of that being she so admired, how it vibrated through her, body and mind, from head to foot. She recognised the strength and force of the arm, yet how gentle and reverent its contact was with her now. How strange it is that amongst a hundred men who might touch a woman and leave her wood and stone to them there is perhaps just one whose slightest contact may give her that extreme ecstasy!

She did not move from him, only looked up with all the fires of the sunset in her eyes. The face that she would have chosen out of all the world hung just above her; the man that she would have chosen out of all the world was there beside her, seeking her. She had no other thought than to please him, to yield to his empire. At any cost, at any sacrifice of herself, at the price of her life, if necessary, she was dedicated, consecrated to him; worship, adoration was in her face and in her heart as she looked up at him. It is the spontaneous impulse in all virgin love, and those women who have not felt it for their lovers have missed love's soul.

Everest bent down and kissed her, and in all her after years Regina could never recall a higher pinnacle of joy to which she had climbed than was reached in that first kiss. The very purity of it, the first expression of her whole ardent, unstained soul, the etherealised emotions of awe and wonder of devotion that went through it, lifted it out of the range of earthly things. Regina's kiss, full of passionate enthusiasm as it was, was still like the burning kiss of the young nun upon her rosary, as the strains of the

anthem bear away her soul to heaven. Everest understood her perfectly, practised as he was in these matters, and being himself of that sensitive timbre that made him respond easily to and comprehend every grade of varying emotion in another.

People had called him dissipated and reckless, simply because he had always been unconventional and lived according to the laws of his own conscience instead of the laws of the world. But all his pleasures had been of the refined and delicate order, things of the mind and soul as well as the body — the pleasures of the wild poetic Celtic nature rather than of the coarse and brutal Saxon. The mere wallowing of the body in physical indulgence, whether of drunkenness, overeating, or other vice, was unknown to him. The excitable brain, the refined and sensitive mind, in his case must be charmed and captured before pleasure could begin.

It was to these that Regina in her innocent and unveiled admiration so appealed, and his touch was very tender and gentle as he drew her wholly into his arms up against his breast, and the girl yielded, silent, submerged in that overwhelming first delight of love, that no after one can wholly surpass. So they stood for a few minutes in the light, both feeling the happiness of the world was absolutely complete.

Then the man relaxed his clasp suddenly and put her away from his arms in the same decisive way he had drawn her into them. His face was very pale and set as he turned from her and leaned over the balustrade, looking away to the gorgeous fires of the west.

Regina stood quite silent, passive, shaken with happiness, voiceless.

He had put her away from him, swept over by some feeling she did not understand, but she yielded to that as obediently as when he had drawn her to him. It was a delight to watch him, and her fascinated eyes strayed over him as he leant beside her; and behind him, growing deeper and fiercer every moment, burned the red flare of the sunset.

After a long silence, in which Regina had studied the fine outline of his head and neck, the small ear, the dear arm in the light grey sleeve, the fine linen of the cuff enclosing the smooth and supple wrist, he said:

“I should be so interested in your paintings, when may I see them?”

“It is rather difficult,” she answered, in a low tone. “I don’t think my people would like me to bring them to the drawing-room, they don’t really care about any of those things.”

There was a pause for a moment, then he said, turning to her:

“Would you like to bring them to my sitting-room after dinner, some time when the others are gone to bed?”

“Yes, I could do that,” she answered simply. He saw she was thinking at the moment only of her work, and the unconventionality of such a visit did not oppress her, was not even near her mind.

“We must go now,” she said regretfully, “or we shall be late. I think,” she added slowly, “we had better not go back together. Will you go home and I will follow by the short cut to the house. My sis-

ters know that I spend a great deal of my time here, but they would not like it if they thought that you came. They would want to come here too, and then all the peace and beauty I enjoy would be spoiled. Do you see?"

"Perfectly," said Everest, smiling, as they turned from the sea to the scented shades of the garden.

"This place has always been for you alone and now it is to be for us alone. We will share it with no one and tell nobody of our comings and goings."

He spoke lightly, jestingly, but both felt that the pact they had made was a serious one, a pact for companionship in hidden solitude in this magic, intoxicating place.

The paths were very narrow between the encroaching foliage of flowering shrubs on every side, and they had to walk closely together, sometimes touching each other in the soft violet shade beneath the overhanging trees, and each time her fair head and rose cheek moved near him he longed to draw her into his arms and kiss her again, but he would not yield to the impulse, and almost in silence they passed on through the groves till they were near the high gate by which he had entered.

"Will you jump it again?" she said, smiling up at him.

"No; I have no inclination now," he answered. "There is nothing I want on the other side."

The girl coloured and laughed at the implied compliment. Bending down and putting the key in the gate, she opened and pushed it. It swung wide, giving access to the quiet road, full now of a luminous rose dusk beneath its arching trees.

“Shall I see you and the pictures this evening?” he asked.

“Yes, I will bring them,” she answered, and just at that moment, over their heads in the thickets of climbing rose, a nightingale burst into its loud throbbing, commanding call. They listened, hesitating, while the mad, impatient beat of it vibrated through the quiet air, and far off somewhere in the woods, after an interval, came back an answering call.

Then he passed through the gate and the girl stood watching him, delighting in the beauty of his quick and easy walk down the shadowy road. When he had vanished she turned back and went by the winding path to the centre palm, and there, beneath its protecting boughs, she threw herself down, laying her face against the bosom of the springing turf.

“I was right, I was right,” she murmured to herself. “It is more beautiful than music, than the sunset skies, than the golden light on the palms, than the play of the moonbeams; and it is like them all. Bright as the sunlight, mysterious as the ocean, wonderful as the fragrance of the rose, that is what they call love, and I have it, I have found it in its perfection. What happiness! What good fortune!” She lay still and silent, wrapped round and round in a strange soft delight, lulled as if in some half-waking dream by the cooing of the doves above her, the wave of the tamarisk in the hot air, the low murmur of the sea.

The doves came down near her, finding her so still. They were very tame, for she came there to feed them all through the winter, and she heard the twinge of its lovely wings as one almost brushed her cheek.

She turned and stretched out her hand to it. "Bird of Venus," she said softly, "Erasmie peleia, come and talk to me." And the dove let her gather it up to her breast and put her lips on its sleek head. "Born of love and for love, I love you," she murmured to it. "Did you see him kiss me this evening? Oh, dove! how wonderful that was." She pressed her warm hands on the shoulders of the bird and kissed it again. Then she opened her clasp and let it go, for she could not bear to constrain it, but the bird only fluttered as far as her feet and stayed there beside her, pecking in the grass.

Regina looked up to the sky through the palm leaves. It was deeply flushed now, even to the zenith, and strangely luminous.

"For their paradise, the Mohammedans thought of beauty and women — that is, love — and the Christians thought of the rapture of music and the ecstasy of adoration, and that is love too; the idea underlying both is the same, and neither could think of anything better than that."

She was a little late for dinner, but everybody else was the same, and the Rector never stormed nor swore at his family before strangers. Moreover he was in a particularly good temper, as in addition to Everest's cheque he had picked up another good donation for the cottages from Lady Delamere. So the dinner was quite a cheerful meal and passed over in good temper and gaiety.

At ten-thirty Everest was sitting in his sitting-room expecting Regina. The room was lighted by large swinging lamps depending from the ceiling, so that the light was good and well diffused; on the

table stood a spray of white roses in a vase, for Everest was fond of flowers, and as he had not found any put in his room he had gathered some in the Rectory garden and brought them in himself.

The window stood open and the scent of the climbing flowers all around the sill filled the air with fragrance.

He sat idle, thinking of Regina and the strong, fearless, self-reliant sort of character she had. How simply and easily she had assented to his invitation to come to his room to show her pictures! Just as a man would do. She seemed to be entirely without that mincing, mawkish way so many girls and women have, that silly, hesitating questioning about every trifle. Shall I? Ought I? Is it proper? Will it seem this or that?

Regina gave him the idea of being absolutely innocent and upright, and therefore candid and fearless; never accustomed to consider or trouble about the opinions of others. He felt that about her own actions she would only ask herself, Is it right? Whereas most people do not care in the least about that, all they ever ask themselves is, What will others think? How will it seem? Will it be found out? And this attracted him in her greatly.

At a little after the half-hour he heard her step outside and went to open the door for her. She came in with a smile, both hands full of her paintings, clasping them to her.

Everest pulled forward some chairs, and together they set the sheets up, leaning against the backs, where the light fell best upon them. There were about twenty paintings in water-colour and they

found places for most of them. Then Everest retreated to the point from where he could see them best and considered them in silence.

He was surprised. He had expected something more of the ordinary young lady's drawing-room decorations, though he felt sure that all Regina created would be artistic and beautiful. But here he saw at once it was a special talent that he was looking at, that here was no question of a little skill acquired with a drawing-master's aid. Here were no copies of rustic cottages, nor yet the inevitable mill, water-wheel and bridge.

Each picture was strong, vivid, with its own marked stamp upon it, and a challenging originality was in them all. The tones of colour, the effects of light were marvellous ; sunset and dawn, the radiance of the late afternoon, the deep shades of approaching night — all were here rendered in their idealised, sublimated form, showing, as the artist always seeks to show, the essence of beauty.

Regina stood beside him, also looking at the pictures. He divined that she was quite lost in their contemplation, that his own presence for the moment was a secondary thing. This also proves the artist, for to him even the height of passion is less than the height of his artistic attainment.

“What do you think of them?” she asked, after a silence.

“I think they are quite beautiful; they are surprising. You have a magnificent gift.”

Regina flushed and trembled with pleasure. Hitherto her art had given her intense joy as she recognised the worth in her creations. But now she

felt that intenser joy of bringing it forward to another and seeing its effect on him, for the first time. The praise that we know ourselves is true! What a delight it brings with it. That this man whom she so admired and longed to please should be interested in her work, surprised at its excellence, made her heart beat and her eyes dance.

Everest was greatly interested. An artist himself, he saw directly the difficulties of the subjects she had chosen, and the talent that was necessary to overcome them as she had done. He picked up first one and then another, looking at them from a distance to see the general effect and examining them closely to consider the workmanship, and the girl sat silent, watching him, as he handled her sacred work that was so dear to her and that had never been before any eyes for judgment until now. Her sisters and mother knew that she painted, and had seen her work occasionally in her room, but knowing and caring nothing about such things they had not heeded it.

Now she sat absorbed, watching him and the beautifully coloured work glowing in his hands.

“They are all wonderfully done. As you have had no lessons, and never been taught, it simply means you have a great genius for it,” he said, laying down the last sheet and looking over to where she sat, a sweet picture herself in her white dinner dress, gazing so earnestly at him with her lustrous eyes, her rose-hued face supported on her hand, her milky, dimpled elbow leaning on the chair arm.

“I am so glad,” she said softly. “I hoped it might be so, for when I go to Exeter and see exhibi-

tions of painting there, and the things they sell in the shops, somehow I feel that mine are — well, different."

"They are quite different, and very much better than the ordinary water-colour — this is a most difficult subject, and perfectly done." He lifted a painting of the enchanted garden. All across the foreground waved boldly the mass of wild flowering tamarisk; admirably thrown back, the garden and its wealth of roses was seen behind and beyond, far off across the hazy blue of the sea burned the sunset sky in softest crimson.

"I should like to have that in my gloomy London rooms."

"Would you really?" she answered, all her face glowing. "Do then accept it. I am so proud and honoured and delighted. Do, please, choose any one you like, or more than one. They would all be yours if you wished it."

"This one appeals to me specially, and I shall never part with it, because it is the scene of our first kiss," Everest said, in a low tone, and rose with the picture in his hand to make space for it on the mantelpiece. As he did so he took a velvet case from before the glass and laid it on the table. It was just by Regina, and she glanced at it.

"What a beautiful face," she said, as the miniature of a girl's head with a delicate, cameo-like profile met her eyes.

"That? Yes; it's my cousin. She is considered very pretty," answered Everest from the mantelpiece, where he was installing her painting.

A little chill came over Regina as she looked; the

cold, perfect face seemed to hold her gaze. His cousin's! Her portrait here! Suddenly his life, his far-off existence that was all so vague to her, had put out a hand and claimed him.

She sat silent, and Everest turned from the hearth, closed the frame and laid it on a side-table. Regina's painting now sat enthroned before the glass. The whole room was bright with pictures. Windows seemed open everywhere in the walls through which one saw vivid skies and seas and waving trees. They spoke about them all in turn; two artists together with fresh work to view will sit and talk all night over it if left undisturbed.

It struck twelve by her sister's silver clock on his table, before either of them noticed how the time had gone.

She sprang up from her chair and gathered the paintings together.

“How wrong of me to stay so late! And you came here to get well and keep early hours; I am so sorry.”

She was going, and Everest rose from his seat and saw her flushed with excitement and pleasure, a joyous, shining vision in the lamplight. The colour came suddenly to his own face, the dark eyes lit up, he made a movement towards her.

“Regina, one good-night kiss.”

She looked back at him standing under the light. Just behind him, near the closed panels of the door into his room, over his shoulder she saw the open casement standing wide to the mysterious, all-sheltering night. She hesitated, and suddenly Everest turned aside.

"No, it is better not; you are my guest this evening. Good-night, my sweet."

Regina backed towards the door and softly, silently vanished through it. With flying, noiseless feet she ran up the stairs to her own room and there, laying the paper sheets on the bed, threw herself on her knees beside it with her head on her outstretched arms.

CHAPTER III

THE GIFT

FOR some days Everest and Regina had no opportunity of meeting in the enchanted garden. The family had the idea that their guest was to be entertained and amused, and set themselves to their self-imposed task with commendable thoroughness. He was driven out to afternoon teas, escorted to flower-shows, taken to garden-parties; lawn-tennis was arranged for the morning; rides in the wood or motor-boat excursions on the sea for the afternoon; and though Regina took no part in a great many of these various diversions, still the same roof was sheltering them both, they saw each other constantly, and almost always at breakfast the conversation was entirely theirs. In this way the passion between them grew and grew; all the more steadfastly as it was impossible for them to gratify their strenuous wish to be alone in each other's society, to know the joy again — the “divine joy,” as Plato describes it, “of the kiss and the touch.”

Regina grew to admire him more and more as their talks together revealed his views and opinions; his wonder at the logical clearness of her mind, the extent of her reading, the leaping quickness of her intellect, increased with each day, and as his passions had always a large share of mentality in them this brilliance of her brain attracted him as much as

her soft colour or her waving hair. Every day as she talked with him across the breakfast-table, or listened to him, with wide, interested, reverent eyes, he longed to press those bright lips and draw the dear clever head down on his shoulder.

At last, after some days of unintermittent social gaiety, he said to the Rector, when they were alone: "Look here, John, I don't want you to exert yourself to provide these sorts of amusements for me. I can have all this in town. You know I came here to rest and be quiet and get rid of the fever. I like it best when I can just stroll about in the woods and have nothing to do."

"You're perfectly free to do just what suits you best," returned the Rector, "don't let anyone worry you. The girls are going to some garden-party this afternoon, I believe, but don't let them drag you there if you don't care about it."

"I think I will really stay away this time," Everest answered. "I should like to stroll somewhere in the country this afternoon and so get some exercise."

It fell out accordingly that the feminine portion of the family, exclusive of the youngest daughter, drove away to the garden-party after luncheon, the Rector went to the village to inspect his schools and Everest was left alone to walk down to the sea, to the enchanted garden, to *Regina*.

She was there waiting for him under the blossom-laden trees, in her prettiest of pale green dresses, and without any speech at all they rushed into each other's arms, and kissed, driven by a wild instinctive, self-preservative longing to make an exchange of that electricity, that had been stored up in each of

them for many days, increasing every hour, and, since it was denied any outlet, burning into their own heart and brain, and consuming their vitality.

Those sweet, glad kisses restored the balance of electricity between them and seemed to fill them with new life and energy. It was such a lovely day, where should they go, what should they do? And when Everest suggested walking somewhere, the girl was ready with ideas and plans, like an orderly laying the new route before the colonel.

“Let us walk if you like along the sands to the next village. There is a dear little inn in the bay where we can have tea and then come round by the wood home. Would you like that?” she asked, gazing up to his handsome face, the skin of which looked so cool and clear in the green light of the garden — green light which intensified the darkness of his eyes in their downward gaze upon her.

“Very much,” he answered simply; and so they started, descending from the garden by a little gate in the porphyry balustrade, and a steep flight of steps to the hard glistening sands, to walk to Heddington, a small sunlit village lying far back in the bay. That walk, how it remained always in the girl’s memory! — that happy walk along those glittering sands, at the border of the purple sea. How her dancing feet carried her along beside him! She felt so joyously conscious of her youth and health. She knew that the sloping sunbeams turned her hair into gold beneath her straw hat, that the purple of the sea and the blue of the sky got into her eyes, and that he was pleased with her as his gaze met hers. And their talk; what a splendid thing it was; its new-

ness, its range over so many themes delighted her. The talk of Stossop always stayed in Stossop, and wearied the girl to death by its inane repetitions, but their talk wandered all over the world and took them with it and up and down the centuries from Palæolithic times, and sometimes it called up visions of Indian coral and they almost looked to see it in the Devon sea, and sometimes it made a distant group of black rocks seem like an ancient caveman fighting a bear. And yet it was all so light and laughter-filled, with none of the pedagogic solemnity of the half-educated person, trying to show the half of him that knows and keep concealed the half which is ignorant.

Everest never talked like a schoolmaster, but as an artist — in pictures; and Regina had nothing of the schoolmistress in her, only that true, deep thirst for knowledge, that had carried her down into the depths of the heaviest learning and from which she had emerged, her brain brilliant and shining, her language full of beauty and supple and keen.

To both, the moments seemed to race by like a golden stream. They hardly seemed to have left the red steps of the garden before they found themselves at Heddington, and Everest ordered tea for them to be brought out on the creeper-covered terrace, that hung over the shining sea.

When they first turned the angle of rock, and came into the small, white-sanded bay and saw the inn just in front of them, in its bridal veil of white roses, the girl sighed and stayed still.

“Oh, I am so sorry to think our walk is over!”

Everest came close to her, slipped his hand through her arm and pressed it.

"Why should you be sorry, darling?" he asked. "We are not going to part here. We shall still be together."

There was a tender accent, a stress of deep feeling in his voice. Her eyes looked up to his face, her breath came and went quickly. She was not to be sorry — and he was not — because they were still together.

So the great fact was voiced between them, and they became aware of the pressing desire, the colossal wish, beside which everything else became insignificant, the wild, passionate longing in each — to be together.

"I know," she said falteringly, after a pause, "but I am so sorry to think that half the time is gone. We are that much nearer to it being over," and from that minute she felt inclined to catch at each moment going by; all of them were wonderful, precious moments, and they shone in her memory afterwards, like golden stars, in the dark nights of her future.

The moment when they entered the cramped dark hall of the inn, where a mysterious blue light reigned, owing to the blue paper covering the glass of the end window, and giving effectively, yet economically, the idea of a stained-glass casement. This blue light, in its novelty, called fresh pleasure to her mind, as she saw the reflection of her own face in the hall mirror float mistily and lily-like in it.

The moment when, emerging on the terrace, they sat down under the canopy of rose, looking out towards the sea, now calm, only slightly tremulous, all pink and silver in the quiet bay, and she heard Ever-

est ordering tea for them, with every luxury imaginable added for her, she knew for her, since he rarely took cakes and chocolates and strawberries and cream; and the moment when they sat silent and very near together, looking at each other over the empty tea-cups, and drinking in the peace and sweetness, the calm of all about them.

What a pity to have to go back to the Rectory. Overhead a little window, embowered in roses, looked out upon the sea. That window belonged to a room that the voluble innkeeper had offered Everest if they wanted to stay the night. What a pity that they couldn't stay at the little inn and sit side by side on its terrace, looking out to a pink and silver distance for ever and ever! Such thoughts were in their minds, equally in the man's as in the girl's; with such little simple pleasures does cunning Nature amuse her cleverest children, for these little things, these tiny golden seconds, are bridges leading over to the great, the greatest things in life.

And the walk back inland, through the great green woods, was a rapture too, though pierced by pain, as each step brought them nearer home.

Their talk went on, bright, inspiring talk, never personal, never petty, but always on the wide, open fields, in the broad plains of thought and intellect; for these two were absolutely alike in their abhorrence of the common and the commonplace, the mean, the small and the trivial, and they were also very singularly akin in all emotions and modes of thought, in their estimation of man, in their view of him as the blot upon creation, as Nature's mistake, in their estimation of his rapacity and cruelty, his infinite lit-

tleness and stupidity. They were alike too in their love for the animal world, for all the gracious, sweet and lovely lives about us on this earth, that man, in his stupendous imbecility, dares to say were created for him to trample upon.

In this connection, the girl asked him suddenly if it were true that he had shot much in Africa, and Everest replied: "I used to shoot a good deal, but I never liked it, except as an exhibition of skill, and as one gets older one sees more and more into the horror of taking innocent and beautiful lives for one's own amusement." And Regina loved him more than ever for this speech.

Their minds in their kinship were like two eagles, that, flying from different quarters, had suddenly met and, happy in companionship, after lonely travel, soared upwards to the blue zenith together.

The difference in age was hardly perceptible between them. Everest had been at eighteen just like Regina now, and Regina at forty-six would be like Everest now, and so they met and talked on equal ground, as a man soliloquises with himself.

Everest did not seek to kiss her until they came to the border of the home copse where they must part. There he drew her into a close, long embrace and she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him back as she had not ventured to do till now — their talk had drawn them so near to each other. Then white and breathless she ran from him through the mossy copse and so home and upstairs, and Everest later slowly crossed the lawn to the Rectory and his own rooms, entering by the long French windows.

For many days after this, they met in the enchanted garden, and Regina lived in paradise.

Everest was supposed to need exercise, and every afternoon took a walk to the sea unaccompanied. The two elder girls were not good walkers enough to be able to go with him, and after a hint from their father forbore to press their own or other society upon him, but, as he spent the entire morning and evening in their company, left him undisturbed in the afternoon, to sleep if he felt touches of fever returning on him, or to walk where the fancy took him.

Though they did not know it, it always took him to the Chalet and its garden. Every day the girl in her new-found emotions, in her joy and pride and innocent happiness, grew more lovely. Her eyes shone more brightly, her skin grew more exquisitely transparent; but it was not the same with Everest; the sense of the Future gripped him too strongly, and sleepless, troubled nights brought back the fever. Daily his cheek grew paler, and except when talking, or under the influence of some emotion, his face did not have the same animation, nor his eyes the same brilliance, as when he came.

One afternoon when they met in the garden she saw at once that something was oppressing him. His face was white, and the usually calm lines of the brows were contracted with pain.

“My darling, I cannot stay here,” he said, after their first long kiss. “You must not ask me, sweetest one. It is killing me, and it is too dangerous for you. This garden seems to alter everything. . . . When I am here, I forget the world of men outside, in

which, after all, vile as it is, we have to live. I must go, Regina, before it is too late."

"It is too late," she answered, in a low voice. "Oh, Everest, if you knew what I shall feel when you go. It is so dreadful, so impossible, to give you up. . . . All the rest of my life must be wretched. . . . I have only this time, these wonderful days, while you are here, to be happy in. . . . Don't shorten them. Stay with me a little longer . . . !"

And in the still magic shade of the garden, Everest promised to stay, because it seemed to him, too, that it was impossible to leave her, and all the world, the hateful, ridiculous, jarring world, seemed far away, non-existent, under those fragrant roses, where the nightingales sang and Nature held full sway.

But that same night, at home, in his room, the idea came again very sharply before him that his duty was either to go away or to offer to marry Regina.

It was treacherous, cruel, dishonourable to stay any longer, unless he did that; he had stayed too long as it was, he knew; but that was done now. He could not help it, all he could do was to go at once, before things were still worse. Mechanically, he began to put a few things together that he always packed himself. Then he stopped, and sat down again. Suppose he just followed his own desires, and did not trouble about anything else? . . . Suppose he married Regina, and gave himself up to golden weeks of wandering with her? . . . There was no reason why he should not. He was free to marry if he chose. But the permanence of it, the insane laws of the thing frightened him, as it had done all his life.

He sat silent, looking down at the floor, thinking

deeply; everything grows so much more complicated and difficult to decide as one grows older. One loses that saving narrowness of view that, in youth, prevents one from seeing more of a project than the side presented to one, and so simplifies one's course of conduct. In youth, too, everything seems so permanent; that clears away another difficulty. In love matters it makes everything remarkably easy. . . . We love, and our passion is certain to last for ever and ever. Then, it is fairly easy to arrange for it. But as we grow older we see that nothing is permanent. Everything is moving, shifting, changing, and the whole difficulty of man arises from the fact that he will shut his eyes to this universal truth. He makes institutions and laws, which would only be good and serviceable if our emotions, our passions, ourselves were lasting and changeless instead of being the victims of constant metamorphoses, and consequently man's life is a perpetual and fruitless struggle to adapt these solid, permanent and unelastic inventions to the restless varying of his life and his being.

Thus do we bid him build the solid rock house of marriage — where? — upon the shifting sands of his passions and emotions.

Can we expect it to be a success?

Everest knew that he loved Regina now, that he passionately longed for and desired her; and the feeling seemed so strong, so deeply rooted that it might well last for the traditional "ever." . . . But experience told him that, of the many, many passions and loves he had felt before, all had varied, and shifted, and changed, and in due course, from one ailment or another, languished, sickened and died.

'And on their death he had been free. But in this case he was considering, when they died, he would be enveloped, shackled in the chains of marriage! He thought of all his married friends. . . . There was not one who did not envy him his freedom, and yet most of them must have felt at some time that same stress of emotion for their wives as he felt for *Regina* now. He sprang to his feet suddenly.

"No! No! I will not be so foolish as to be led into it! In town, in a few weeks, I may have forgotten her altogether."

He recommenced collecting his letters and papers with feverish vigour. He knew he must go, and he would do so the day after to-morrow. His resolve was quite genuine, and he looked out the up-trains himself in *Miss Marlow's* ready laid hand-book, and packed his writing-case and small trunks.

But Nature, who doesn't mind in the least about marriage, but is very keen on carrying out those matters which really concern her, is not to be put off by a human being just packing his suit-case.

The following afternoon, when *Everest* started from the Rectory for his walk seawards, as he left the grounds, he met the curate coming up from the village, and as he greeted him the young man joined him.

"I'm going to visit a parishioner who lives in a little cottage on the beach. Are you going that way? If so, we might walk down together."

Everest assented pleasantly, though on that particular day no man's company was particularly welcome to him. His whole excitable nature was now strung up to one painful and horrible duty: the wrenching himself away from a woman that he loved

with certainly the best and highest passion he had ever felt in his life. His blood seemed all on fire, and running the wrong way in his veins; his teeth seemed on edge; all his nerves shaken. But he showed none of this: he looked to the curate singularly calm, quiet and self-possessed.

For a few minutes they spoke on indifferent subjects, and then the young man said suddenly:

“ You are making quite a long stay in Devon? ”

There was a sort of questioning note in his voice, and Everest, not having spoken to anyone yet of his resolved departure, merely answered:

“ Yes; it is very lovely here.”

There was a silence, in which Everest felt sure the curate was gathering strength to address him on some subject of special import, and his mind went immediately to village schools, the poor and subscriptions, but, to his amaze, when the curate spoke, it was of — *Regina*!

“ I expect you have great opportunities of talking with her, have you not? ”

To which Everest replied frankly, wondering what was coming:

“ Yes, we have talked a great deal.”

“ Has she ever,” the curate coughed nervously, “ told you about me? ” he said at last.

Everest’s surprise grew.

“ Not beyond mentioning your name and your services to her father, I think,” he answered.

“ She never mentioned, I suppose, that I . . . I was anxious . . . I proposed to marry her? ”

“ No; certainly not. I never heard it,” returned Everest promptly and emphatically.

A wave of hot emotion, he could not tell exactly of what kind, but certainly surprise and anger mixed in it, came over him as he heard another man speak of Regina, and reveal his attitude towards her, speak of marriage with her! She was his . . . his . . . his. . . . How dare the curate talk of her! . . . She was wholly Everest's, his own property. She belonged solely, utterly to him, and then the memory came: he was going to leave her, *he* was going away, he was leaving her to herself, to Stossop, to the people here, to this . . . curate!

In a whirl of anger he heard the next words:

"She refused me," uttered the young man faintly. "You see," he continued, "she is so very young, I think perhaps she hardly knows her own mind, and I, of course, have no chance of being very much with her or pleading my cause. I thought it was just possible, since you are with her so much, you could put in a word for me. A girl is so much influenced sometimes by what an older man says. He has the weight of a father, and yet more than the influence of a father, because he comes from the outside. He's a stranger. Regina would listen, I think, to all you said. . . . I want her to consider things a little, to consider how lonely a woman's life is, unmarried. . . ."

The curate's voice went on, but Everest lost what he was saying in the angry maze and swirl of his own thoughts.

So this was what he was driving at! It was not flannel clubs, nor coal tickets, nor choir classes now; it was not subscriptions this time. He was being asked to persuade Regina — his Regina — to marry

another man, this man — this limited, narrow-minded, microscopic curate!

Then he became aware that the man was talking of Regina herself, telling him how wonderful she was, so unlike the other sisters, so unlike anyone he had ever known, and drawn on by Everest's quiet, apparently sympathetic attention he began to dilate on his own love for her, his ardent desire for her happiness.

"And do you think a girl like Regina Marlow would be happy as a clergyman's wife?" interrupted Everest mildly.

Inwardly he was furious at the tone of proprietorship that unconsciously crept into the curate's voice.

"I think she would when she had settled down," he answered. "I know she is very original, and has all sorts of fancies, now, but that soon disappears. When once a girl is married, and face to face with her duties in life, her children, her home, her regular employment steady and settle her."

A silent rage consumed Everest as he heard this speech, delivered in the rather pompous tones that the curate, without meaning to be offensive, generally slipped into.

That morning, when he had been thinking of that alternative to his going — marrying Regina — deep in his heart had been the idea of children. Never before in his life had he met a woman by whom he would so gladly have had sons as by her. It was just that steel-like sharpness of the brain, that clear, unclouded intellect, that swiftness of motion, that agility of limb, that vital force of energy in body and

mind, that he would like to see in his sons — if he had them. That soul of a lioness, that frank, brave, upright nature she had revealed to him, is not a very modern type. It reminded him more of the old Roman spirit that lived in Regulus and Lucretia, and this thought had swayed him very near indeed to the idea of marriage. Only again, to his sensitive, comprehensive brain, the thought of maternity brought the idea of sacrifice, and it showed how deeply really his love for the woman had gone, that he shrank from anything which would involve her in suffering and danger. He felt he could not bear the thought of this gay, beautiful, radiant creature, risking, and perhaps giving up, her life, so full of powers for artistic creation, for his sake, through the gratification of his passion in bearing children to satisfy his ambitions.

And this had carried his mind away again from marriage; it made the matter more complex still. If he married, it was essential for his property that his wife should have children, but he saw suddenly now, and for the first time, what an ordeal loomed before him in giving over a woman, whom he loved as much as he loved *Regina*, to suffering and to danger.

Perhaps the ancient Greeks were influenced by this same feeling when they married women merely to have and rear their children, while giving their love and devotion and life companionship to others.

And now, here, when he, *Everest*, whom the girl loved, and who had such great compensations to give in return for all he asked from a woman, hesitated and contemplated the extreme of sacrifice, that this

sacred life might be left undisturbed, while he was planning to leave her, to tear himself from her, for her sake, this wretched man at his side was quietly talking of her duties, the tasks she was to be forced into, the quiet, humdrum, irksome life she was to be bound to, the risks of maternity she was to face, to gratify him, that he might enjoy to the full this lovely flower, which Everest held too sacred to gather himself! It was no use to leave her! If he did, this man, or some other like him, would force her into an odious existence, such as was here sketched out.

His heart seemed to swell with fury, as he thought of it, dark mists of rage rose over his brain, darkening his mental vision.

“I am sure I shall win her in time,” the voice went on at his side. “All that is wanted is persistence, determination. . . . That young Markham, who shot himself in London, it was a wrong thing to do, of course — and so foolish! If he had come back here, and persisted, he might have won her, just as I firmly believe I shall win her.”

And in answer to a question of Everest’s, he was taken through the history of Regina’s refusal to Markham, and the tragedy which followed, and the other histories of the refusals, and all this talk went to Everest’s brain like corroding fire. It awoke and inflamed all that selfishness of his love which, with Regina, and for her sake, he had kept suppressed, and controlled. It rose up now to its full power and fought with his reason. It filled him with rage. He longed to take the curate up by his neck, and throw him over the hedge.

At last the waving trees of the garden came in

sight, and he was now all impatience to get away from him, but he felt bound to accompany him to the cottage, and see the door shut upon him, before turning to the garden.

“A clergyman wants a wife for all this sort of thing,” the latter remarked plaintively, as they neared the dirty little hovel on the beach; “these people must be visited, especially when they are sick, and it’s a woman’s work: it takes too much of a man’s time.”

Everest ground his teeth silently. He would not trust himself to speak. Another moment, and they were at the door.

A filthy woman, followed by a crowd of still filthier children, opened it. The sound of coughing and a baby crying came from the dark interior.

“You won’t come in?” said the curate.

Everest declined, the curate disappeared, and the door was shut.

Feeling mad, like one who has drunk vitriolised brandy, his nerves exasperated and his control all gone, Everest turned and walked back rapidly towards the garden, with the swift, eager step of the thirsting wolf scenting water. He came to the gate and laid his hand on it. It was locked. He called her name. There was no answer. Each little thing, each resistance made his anger mount higher, augmented the state of turmoil he was in. He drew back a little from the gate, then jumped over it, feeling he could have leapt over one a hundred times higher, and began to scour the silent, scented ways of the garden.

The birds called over his head, the fragrance came in clouds to meet him, he noticed nothing.

Suddenly, as his quick feet carried him down one of the darkest rose alleys, he came upon Regina. She was asleep on a little bank, in the deep shade, almost invisible under the drooping boughs of a laburnum, that poured its golden treasure to the ground.

With a single step he was beside her, he had caught her into his arms. She awoke to find herself clasped to his breast, her face being covered with wild, fierce kisses.

“ You are mine. You cannot and shall not belong to anyone else . . . !”

The garden held them — that magic garden that waved and bloomed in quiet peace, far from the riot of the hard and noisy world. Far more beautiful than any cathedral’s were its green and shaded aisles; more beautiful than the anthem’s roll its exquisite melody of rejoicing birds; more sweet its perfume than incense, and Nature breathed over her children there a greater blessing than man can ever give.

Three hours later Everest came back to the Rectory; he went straight up to his room, turned the key in his door, and threw himself face downwards on his bed.

He knew he ought to feel regret, to wish his action undone, to feel fear of future ill, but he could not; still less was any sense of reaction, of revolt, familiar to him in similar situations, near him now.

From head to foot, one great pulse of elation, satisfaction, joy and triumph beat through him. She was his, and those moments had been his — moments unequalled before in all his life of varied success with women. He recalled the scene with wondering ec-

stasy: the beauty of the garden, the transfigured face of the girl, the pure, unclouded rapture of those lustrous eyes, as she yielded to his arms, the radiant glory of all the air about them, its intoxicating, fragrant stillness. Was the garden really enchanted, as she called it. What was she, this girl? Was she a goddess who had descended to his embrace? In the proud joy of her self-surrender, in the ecstatic passion of her kiss, in the glamour of poetry and beauty she threw over every action which with other women was so commonplace, she seemed to be.

Of their act she had made a thing akin with beauty, with radiance, with light, and he could only feel glorified, as he saw she did.

Innocently, grandly, full of a fervent delight in him, as she had in beauty, she had given herself to him, as Venus might have given herself to Anchises; he could think of no other simile.

And to the tender love he had felt invade his soul for her in those after moments which to some are so bitter, he could find no parallel in all his former existence.

His one desire was to hold her again in his arms, though he had so lately left her, to feel the tender bosom strain against his, to gaze into the wonderful light and fire of those eyes.

This ecstatic state, this empire of mere nature, which knows nothing of convention, nor the ways and laws of the world, over him; this delight of the senses, the afterglow, as it were, of passion, remained with him all the night, and then with the white light of the dawn came a horrible sense of dismay.

What had he done? He had allowed the torrent

of his own wishes, his own desire, to sweep him over the brink of disaster, and he had dragged this innocent, loving creature with him. Some men, in similar circumstances, blame the woman; Everest only cursed himself, as he sprang from his bed to face the coming day.

This bright, young life, so full of wonderful talent, this beautiful, fresh flower, only just opened to the sunlight of life, he had sacrificed to himself, to his passion and pleasure of an hour. It seemed incredible to him, as he thought of it, that he could have been so selfish, so weak, so vile.

What was there in that maddening garden that stole away all sense of the outside world, and seemed to whisper that man was not the trained puppet of the wretched, artificial sphere he has created, but the free, natural, joyous creature Nature intended him to be?

Man must always remember that *he is* a puppet, and a slave, and that the laws of Nature now exist no longer for him. He in his blindness has made other and contrary laws, which he has to obey.

Regina? What of her? What of this waking hour for her? She had not appeared at dinner the previous night. He had not seen her since leaving her in the garden. Was she suffering as he was? He longed to see her, to speak to her. . . . Were those glorious eyes clouded by tears? Was that sweet, smiling face convulsed in misery? It was like iron twisting in his heart to think of it.

He felt as if he had taken a swift, joyous swallow, just rising to the sun, and broken both its wings, and thrown it to the ground, to die. He loathed himself.

He dressed rapidly, made himself some tea with his own lamp, and then sat down by the window, thinking. The girl was just above him; if he could only go to her, see her, find out what she was thinking, feeling.

Other episodes with women had affected him differently. In nearly all it had been possible to compensate the woman in some way, or else she was in some invulnerable position of safety, where their deeds would not react upon her. But *Regina*? He foresaw every possible kind of suffering for her in the future, and no reparation could be offered her — except — marriage. . . .

Yes, the thought came whirling into his disordered brain with stunning force. He had the power to change everything for her. If she were in tears, he could dry them instantly; if her heart was beating with fear, he could allay all its terror. He could not undo what he had done, but he could go farther and, as far as she was concerned, give her complete protection and happiness. As he thought of her, as she had been last evening, in the soft shades of the garden, as her image came before him, radiant, inspiring, irresistible, in those moments of ecstasy, he thought he would do that. It was not what he had thought of, wished or desired, when he had come there; but neither was this. To enter his friend's home welcomed by all, and then to steal the fairest ornament there, to leave misery and wretchedness where he had found joyous innocence, unquestioning love and trust. . . .

No, he could not do this. A sense of being dishonoured, if he did, came over him. Never in his life yet had he done a mean or cruel action, and some-

how, looked at in all its lights, this seemed to be both.

Well, he would do that; he would give up all other views and thoughts for his future, and he would marry *Regina*.

This resolve came rolling into his mind on the flood-tide of his troubled thoughts, and found a harbour there.

It was easier for it to do so, because of the very real passion he had for her. Of all the women he had known, none had given him a greater joy than she had, and the idea of possessing her, and her love and youth, and all her passionate impulses, chaining them to himself only, had its seduction.

Everest had reached the meridian of his years, and already, through the green woods of his life, was stealing the cold whisper of the coming winter of age, but with *Regina* he forgot it; she seemed to enwrap him in her eighteen years, to hold the cup of elixir of eternal youth to his lips. With her warm arms about him, her fresh, joyful heart beating on his, it seemed the spring of life must always stay with him. He could not part with her, he would keep her, and know again and again with her those happy hours that were worth all the world could give. Full of the new determination, he rose, and going over to the mantelpiece he closed the open velvet case that contained the perfect face, the delicate, cameo-like features of his cousin, and laid it away amongst other cases, books and papers. That idea was over; that matter was of the past.

He found his writing materials and wrote a few lines to *Regina*.

He did not see her till she came in at the last moment before luncheon, and took her place at the table. He felt afraid to look much at her, lest his eyes should in any way betray him to the others, but one glance at her face told him that she looked pale, and as if she had not slept much the previous night.

Time seemed a blank until the hour arrived when he could start for his afternoon walk, and then he hastened his steps as much as possible, dreading some interruption, some hindrance to seeing her. He felt he could not exist longer, unless he could have speech with her. When he came in sight of the garden he saw the door stood open, and beyond it, against the deep green within, her white lace dress was visible. He hurried forward, and in another moment the gate was shut upon them and their embrace. She had come to meet him. She was not, as he had tortured himself by imagining, tear-stained, broken and drooping, full of sadness and reproaches. She was smiling, fresh, radiant, as usual, with her face full now of rose and pearl, lifted to his, and her soft arms tightly twined round his neck.

They walked a few steps farther, into the deepest recesses of the place, and he told her all he had suffered, and how he hated himself for his selfishness, and how his only thought now was to efface it all from her mind by their marriage as soon as possible.

“I think we will go up to town together, and we will marry there. What do you say?”

His face was very pale as he spoke the decisive words — words that had never passed his lips to any woman before, and that he had always thought vaguely he would say some day in such different cir-

cumstances — circumstances where they would mean linking himself to brilliant, worldly prospects, to landed possessions, to high lineage, to a family old as his own ; and now they were being said to this simple girl, who had none of these, and not even that surprising beauty which sometimes outweighs them all.

She had conquered him where other women all his life long had tried and tried in vain. Why was it ? Unless this ground on which they walked were indeed enchanted. As is the case with so many men, love and marriage stood widely separated in his mind. Love was a wonderful, passionate pleasure, which had been his companion all his life. Marriage was a stupid business arrangement, that he might have to make some time, because certain practical advantages went with it.

He had immense property to leave behind him, and as he entertained the usual family dislike of all his brothers and sisters, he would have preferred to have a legitimate son to whom it would go, but it had been urged upon him, ever since he could remember, that to marry was " his duty," and as he had always found the " duties " discovered for him by others were extremely disagreeable, he had come naturally to have a very real distaste for it. No one had suggested to him that marriage meant, or could or ought to mean, pleasure.

Pleasure and sin were always jumbled together, and held before his eyes, through his childhood and youth, in his severe Scottish home, and marriage was associated with duty, with constraint, with bondage, with monetary considerations, and nothing else ; with everything that he most hated.

'And the result of this training had been far from what his stern family would have wished. The Oriental youth, who leads a cleaner life than English youths, and is a stranger to dissipation, is taught differently. Marriage to him is not represented as a holy penance, involving renunciation and sacrifice, but as the only gate to supreme delight. In all Eastern languages the word for marriage is identical with the word for pleasure.

Does it not seem a wiser method?

So that, considering his upbringing, it was no wonder that Everest's face paled and his heart sank as he pronounced the dismal word "marry," which had always seemed to him to mean the end of everything, the termination of freedom, the finishing of pleasure, the dismissal of love, only to be compensated for by great worldly gain. And here there was no gain. His feet had somehow got entangled in the horrid mesh at last. Yet, as he glanced at the girl beside him, so bright, with her springing step, her rose-like face and her wide, innocent eyes, he could not feel that she had spread it for him, as others had done in vain. No, he had courted disaster, and himself pulled it down upon his head.

Regina stopped in her walk, and looked up at him.

What loveliness in those blue eyes, full of the sky and heaven's own light.

"No, Everest, I am not going to marry you."

The man could never recall exactly what his feelings were as he heard her. Amaze was certainly the first, then a sort of relief, then disappointment, and then, so strange is humanity, a nascent desire that they *should* marry after all.

“ But, my darling, why not? ”

“ Because you don’t really wish it; you ask me because you think it is your duty, after what has happened. But I have given you my love and myself as free gifts, not at a price that you must pay. I have no price. No one can buy me, either by marriage or anything else. Most women have; the women of the town bargain for so many shillings before they give themselves; the women of our class bargain for marriage and settlements, for a home, for fixed income, for the chained servitude to them, for all his life, of the man they say they love; but I feel differently, Everest.” And she turned to him suddenly, stopping under the branch of the swaying palm; her eyes were alight, her form seemed to expand and heighten, red shafts of the sunlight sought out her hair and rested there, crowning her with light. “ I have *given* you what I have given. There is *nothing* I want from you. I have given you myself, and you have given me passion and intense, overwhelming happiness. I do not want, and I will not accept, anything more.”

Everest looked back at her and could not take his eyes away. As in the first hour of their passion, she seemed less to him like a woman than a goddess, an immortal. To talk of worldly things to her, to think of them in her presence, seemed suddenly absurd. In his own room, while thinking of her, she had seemed a helpless girl, whom he had injured, and was bound in honour to protect. Face to face with her now, in the garden, she seemed an all-powerful divinity, who had bestowed upon him gifts that had no earthly price. The vivid sky above them enveloped her with

light, turning her white clothing into gold, and her fair hair into flame, the red glow of it fell across the smooth pallor of her face and shone in the wide-open eyes, regarding him with proud, fearless confidence.

He felt silenced, abashed, confused, with a still more violent passion waking within him for her, now that she seemed to hold herself aloof from him full of conscious power, self-reliant, seeking and asking nothing from him. Like most men, Everest felt a sort of instinctive intolerance of women who clung to him, pursued him. He was kind to them, for that was his nature, but his own passion and desire began to wane the moment its object seemed to be clinging dependently to him. The wild spring towards liberty, the elastic rebound of the captive in his arms, were what stirred the fiercest fires within him, nerved him to the greatest efforts to hold her to him. Now, looking at the passionate, beautiful form of the woman before him, and understanding that she neither wished to curtail his freedom nor give up her own, he really felt he would like to lead her to church, and there bind her to him fast, by all the laws that man and God could devise. He advanced towards her with one of those quick, easy movements that always wrapped her in delight when she saw them, and brought the red deer of Exmoor to her mind.

He took her arms above the elbows; through the muslin she was wearing he could feel their soft firmness, their satin surface. How the touch thrilled him, and her also! The electric shock of joy in the contact was so great to them both that neither could speak or move for the moment, but each stood motionless, gazing into the other's transfigured face.

"But, Regina, I wish it! I want you to marry me!"

"Then you should have asked me before, when you first said you loved me, and I would have consented, to obtain the joy of giving myself to you. Now it is too much like paying a price, too much as if you felt obliged to offer me some reparation, too much as if I had led you into accepting gifts from me, knowing that you would feel bound in honour to pay for them afterwards. Marriage was not in your mind when you came here, not when you saw me, not when you desired me. You wished to go away and I persuaded you to stay. Yes, but not to obtain anything from you, Everest, only to give. . . . To give to you. . . . And, if you knew what supreme delight you have given me, what these hours in this garden have been to me, you would know there is no debt, no need for reparation. . . . If I have to pay with my life for them, which is quite possible, I am ready to pay."

Everest drew her close up to his breast, and held her there tightly.

"My sweet, don't say such things. As long as I am in the world, nothing shall ever hurt you. Say you will come up to town now, and marry me. . . . It will make me much happier."

He looked down on the radiant, light-crowned head pressed against his breast and thought again of the mortal Anchises when the goddess stooped to his kiss.

"Of course I will do anything you wish, if you continue to wish it, a little later, but not now. You shall not feel that, like Medea, I have thrown enchant-

ment over you, and made you do what you never planned."

Everest was silent, lost in a maze of wondering thought. He saw he had been right in his estimation of Regina. She had not the ordinary modern mind, which measures everything by the standards of the world and of convention. She chose to do what she thought was right, and as it did not seem to her right to accept him she would not do so, overwhelming as the advantage to herself would be, horrible in its risks and dangers, its ruin, according to all worldly ideas, as her position without it now was. She had, as he had thought, just the soul of Regulus, who gave himself up to the Carthaginian tortures rather than speak a few words of false advice to Rome. How he admired her, loved her! He realised the greatness of her feelings towards him. She had perfect, absolute trust in him, as she had shown from the first. She was willing to pay the highest price herself for his love, and yet shield him from paying in the smallest coin. How different, how utterly different from all the women he had ever known! There was not one among those who had not fought and scrambled and clutched for self-advantage, self-gain — not one who, in spite of her love for him, would not have willingly sacrificed him to herself.

Regina, like her name, had come to him from Latin times.

He put his arm round her, and they sat down together, very close, sheltered by the laburnum, and the doves flew down, and walked, cooing, on the velvet moss at their feet. They talked of their plans, and

Everest got her to promise this much, that if, when he had been away from her some time, living his own life, amongst his own people, if he then asked her again, perhaps she would consent to marry him.

"You see, my very dearest," she said, in that soft voice of hers, which always stirred his senses, "if you still wish it we will do it, but, if you do change, how much better for you not to have married me now!"

"And better for you too?" he asked.

"No, no, no! You know, just for myself, there would be nothing in the world better for me than to marry you," she returned passionately. "Everest, there is no need for me to tell you that, surely? You must see how it all appears to me. . . . You are so wonderful, so exceptional! . . . I feel you ought to have the very best and loveliest woman who ever existed. . . ."

"Have I not got her here?" returned Everest, with equal passion, leaning over her, and kissing her on the mouth and eyes, so that she could neither breathe nor see. "You try to make me the most conceited man in the world, but I have sense enough left to know I am not half worthy of you."

Regina yielded herself up to his caresses, nestling close against his breast, her lips on the warm brown of his neck, above his collar.

"Listen," she whispered, "I want you to listen to me. I have just this one quality that is good: I love you so intensely, so absorbingly, that myself is nothing to me beside you. It is very difficult to put the absolute extremes of emotion into words, but I love you so much that when I think of you my own life, my own happiness means nothing to me, beside

yours. You must be happy, that's all that matters. Nothing else is of any account at all. If I can in any way make you happy that would be my greatest delight, as it has been already; but I am not sure I should be really doing that by marrying you, and until I am sure, I won't do it. I am after all only a country rector's daughter, without any special birth, position or beauty. . . . No — hush," she said, putting her hand over his mouth, as he tried to interrupt her. "I am only beautiful just now, because I am young and in love with you — blazing with love for you in every vein. That fire lights up my eyes and paints my cheeks and lips, and makes me look beautiful, but that is your gift," she interrupted herself passionately, kissing him on his black hair, above the ear, "you have given me that beauty. . . . It is not the stone-cut massive regularity that the world calls beauty, and so, when your friends saw me as your wife they would say: 'Why has he married her? He must have been trapped in some way — she is only this; she is only that — she has no this, and no that,' and perhaps, after a time, you might get to feel so too. And it would kill me, simply, nothing else, to see you regretted marrying me. You came here as our guest, and we all, as hosts, have a sacred duty towards you. I want you to go away as absolutely free and untied as when you came, free to marry, if you wish, some rich great, wonderful person, your equal, who has magnificent beauty and everything else to offer you."

"Do you think that I could do that now, after yesterday? Marry another woman and put her in the place that belongs to you? I feel now I shall

never care to take another woman in my arms again. You were so sweet to me, so unquestioning, so trusting, and I acted so badly, I shall never forgive myself! It is not you that tie me, my own action binds me."

Regina raised herself with a quick spring in his clasp.

"Whatever obligation there was, if there were any," she said in a low tone, "is paid in full now by your offer and my refusal. Yesterday was a gift to you, a gift, a gift, a gift," she repeated, with hot kisses on his hand at each word, "just as I would give my life itself to you, if you wanted it."

"There must be many days like yesterday, and you can give me something else, which no other woman can, when we are married, for we will marry whatever you say."

"What could I give you?" she asked, with a swift, eager note in her voice.

"A son," returned Everest, kissing her questioning lips, "just like yourself, all courage and fire, and strength, in body and mind. Would you like that, my sweet?"

She clasped her arms tightly round his neck.

"Anything done for you would be my greatest, my supreme delight! Do you wish for children, Everest?"

"No, not personally, but there is the property. I must have a legitimate son or let it all go to my brother. I should hate to have a weak, mindless, feeble child, which could never happen if Regina were its mother! So if, when my visit here ends, I go away to Scotland for some weeks, as I must do to

look after my place, when I come back, you will marry me, will you not?"

"If you wish it — yes," she murmured.

"The suffering, the sacrifices, the danger of maternity, that does not frighten you?"

"No, I am not afraid of anything, Everest."

He looked into her eyes, and in their blue depths he saw that cool, serene courage that he loved, that made his heart throb with admiration, with some sentiment which it was new for him to feel for a woman.

He wanted to tell her this, but he could not at the moment find words in which to define and express it; so in silence he kissed her again, where the sun darting through the leaves lighted up the pink down of her cheek, and, as is the way with lovers, all their talk melted into caresses, and their arguments became kisses, and every thought and emotion were soon merged into mere overwhelming delight in each other.

The golden hours went by, and nothing came to disturb them in their solitude until the evening light, a most gentle messenger, stole through the blossoms in a rosy glow, warning them that they must part.

Everest rose after one last strenuous passionate embrace, and as she saw him standing above her, his brilliant face flushed and smiling, his dark eyes kindling with elation, she felt that this life had given her her due, if it gave no more. When he had gone she lay still for a little while longer in the shadow.

"I was right to refuse to marry him. I am sure I was right. If he loves me he will still wish it. If not, it is I who will suffer, not he, and he will know — he must know now — that I only care about him, that I would die for his happiness," she thought vaguely.

mistily, for she was tired and would have liked to stay there, half waking, half dreaming of him.

It was with a great effort that she got up a little later and walked slowly back to the Rectory.

With dressing for dinner and appearing reasonably conversational at the meal, Everest had not much time for quiet thought until late that night when he was going to bed. Then, as his mind reverted to the afternoon, the stupendous unselfishness of Regina's attitude came before him. If a girl refused such a marriage with a man to whom she was indifferent, the refusal would be remarkable for its negation of so much worldly good; but for one filled with intense and passionate desire for the man who offered it, such a refusal must need the most heroic courage, the greatest steadfastness of purpose, the highest fortitude, the acme of devotion. He sat in his room, absorbed in the contemplation of it, unable to go to bed, unable to sleep, feeling compelled to study this new light on a woman's love.

It was worth while conquering and winning and possessing a woman like that. All his blood glowed within him as he thought of the greatness of that character, the largeness and the splendour of that soul that had yielded to his influence, that had submitted so unquestioningly to him. He had been accustomed to view women somewhat as soft and pretty kittens, liable to scratch and bite sometimes in their little tempers, but, on the whole, caressable and lovable, charming to indulge and to fondle; but he had often thought vaguely how differently he could feel for another type, how glad he would be if a wild lioness, full of her splendid strength and mettle and independ-

ence, sprang across his path and became gentle and tame to him. Caressing a lioness he would like much better than stroking a kitten. And this now had actually happened! He knew that in *Regina*, under her soft and beautiful exterior, lay just those same wild, brave impulses, that contempt for the dangers of life, that enthusiasm for great things and emotions that burned within himself. The realisation that now he had made this soul his own, that, grand though it was, it now virtually knew no law except his will and his pleasure, seemed to send waves of fire through his whole being.

When he at last went to bed that night, it was only to dream of her as she had stood crowned with ruddy light in the garden.

The golden days of June slipped by swiftly, silently, vanishing into the past like radiant dreams, and while the rest of the household, in the sleepy, creeper-covered Rectory, led their ordinary, bovine existence of feeding and sleeping, varied by their un-bovine petty quarrelling, these two at least lived a life of which every hour flew off to Eternity on gilded, flame-coloured wings. When two such deep and strong natures as *Everest's* and *Regina's* come together and mingle, the education to each, the interchange and interplay of emotion and feeling are very great. And as each lovely day of sunshine, or gentle silver rain, or turbulent grey cloud wrought imperceptible changes in the nature round them, added different notes to the nightingales' songs, unclosed new roses and ripened fresh blossom on the lime and chestnuts, ardently leading onward and upward to the glorious perfection of midsummer, so did each day

work mysteriously and enchantingly on the passion and intimacy of these two, unfolding fresh impulses, new thoughts, striking hidden chords, unveiling deep recesses.

This period for them was different in its gentle and subtle teaching, in its gradual drawing away of the sacred veil that floats before the face of passion, from the conventional honeymoon with its abrupt and violent candour, its sudden wrenching down of all the delicate curtains of mystery, of idealism, of poetical fancy which fall round the shrine of love. In a honeymoon the two lovers are flung suddenly into incessant contact, absolute isolation with each other, from which they cannot escape, as one might push a couple of prisoners into a cell. Every obstacle, every bar between them that has till now raised their passion to divine heights is removed. Every duty, every work from which either has been accustomed to receive moral stimulus and support, is laid aside, every diversion, every amusement and occupation taken away. Night and day, without change, without rest, they are thrust into each other's arms. Is it surprising that when the moon is past so few have anything but utter satiety to show for it? — that the wonderful flame of love that lives on excitement, danger, privation, romance, difficulties, should for ever be quenched and put out? — leaving the travellers to wander on down the narrow lane of marriage without its sparkling, radiant light to guide them in its dark places.

Everest and Regina could never meet except by the overcoming of difficulties, by planning, by suffering, between periods of eager waiting, and when they met the parting was never far off, the possibility of dis-

covery, of interruption always present. So the wild pleasure of their first embrace lived in all the others, and their passion for each other increased, as a fire blazes all the more fiercely for a little water thrown on to it and other futile attempts to extinguish it. For the girl, life had suddenly turned into the mazes of a glorious dream. Her ordinary existence of hard work, of study, stood still. She mixed with the rest of the family and did such tasks and duties as were required of her, exactly as a well-regulated machine would have done, her real life for herself began and ended only in the garden. She was glad that she had always spent so much time there, in solitude and away from the others: it made her absences from home now less noticeable.

She would start for the garden the moment after luncheon, and walk with the books, that were never opened, clasped to her as usual, through the hot, silent noonday slowly towards the sea. She loved to reach the garden and be there before Everest, so that she might have time to think and dream there, of him alone. At this scorching hour there was such a deep silence in the thick green shades. The birds were quiet, taking their noontime rest after their ceaseless labours since the first grey light of dawn; the doves even sat puffed and voiceless in and about their cotes; her own light step on the sandy paths was the only sound. How lovely it was to go on, past the lilac bushes, of which the blossom was now over, but the leaves were still fair in their smooth, neat green, between the round and bunchy may-trees, most of them still laden with their pink and white snow and under the hanging veils of gold of the laburnum, until she

reached the green turf beneath the palm, where the roses, so luxuriant in their June growth, no longer stood, as in the winter, like girls waiting for their partners, but joined hands with each other and danced merrily, nodding a thousand blooms as the light breath of summer passed over them. Here she would sit quietly, feeling her heart beating tumultuously at the thought that he was coming to find her there, that she would see the foliage part and the roses give way as the slim, beautiful figure came towards her, the green shade and gold light alternately falling on him. She was never quite sure that he would come. There was always that breathless uncertainty about it that is so painful and yet so delicious. Anything might occur at home that would make it impossible for him to insist on going out alone, and very often it did happen that he was kept and delayed at the last moment, and Regina waited and waited, trembling under the roses, her cheek flushing and paling, her bosom broken up by her heart-beats, until the intensity of longing and hoping and fearing became such that when he did appear she would fall into his arms in a passion of weeping from relief and delight.

But the moments before he came and before she began to fear that he would not come, while the hour was still early, and she sat there awaiting him in her pretty fresh dress, knowing that she was lovely as the flowers themselves in the tender light beneath the trees, were very dear to her. She lost herself in golden, glowing dreams of the future: she would be with him; they would wander together in those wonderful places where he loved to go; she would be beside him, and perhaps danger would come upon him and

she would be able to protect him, save him; perhaps she would have the supreme privilege of dying for him. She would give up her life, oh, how gladly, in shielding him from pain or hurt; but what spoiled the happiness of this dream was the knowledge that Everest must suffer by her death, and yet that idea was delicious too, and she saw into his nature so well, she knew that he too would think nothing of his life if called upon to give it for her. Fortunately, dreams are not exacting, they do not make demands upon our logic. They lull us, soothe us and shut us in with rosy mists and lead us gently along soft, golden ways.

Sometimes all night she could not sleep for the joy of thinking of the morrow, and all the morning she could not read, nor paint, nor play for thinking of the afternoon and looking forward to the moment when she might take her way through the sleepy Rectory garden to the highroad and the sea.

Love is always wonderful, and to a woman always beautiful and entrancing, no matter what the guise in which it comes, or what the time or circumstances. If it comes to her late, when her face has lines in it which cause her agony lest her lover should perceive them, if her lover himself is a very imperfect specimen of humanity, that even her blinded eyes are offended by, even then love still gives her pleasure; but in Regina's case all of her love's setting and circumstance was as lovely as love itself and her joy was unclouded, exquisite, complete. Radiant in her eighteen years, she had no burden of deceit or cares or fears; she could lift her face to Everest and know there was nothing there, nor in her heart, that she dreaded him to find, and in his countenance bending over her there

was that beauty, that perfection that gives rapture to the eyes as a melody does to the ears. Often returning from the garden, through the sweet-scented meadows in the long, light evenings, those calm evenings of the English summer which seem to carry madness to the blood of youth, after a long and happy afternoon spent with him, it seemed to her as if her head was light with joy, as if her brain or heart must burst with the excited happiness of loving and being loved by such a man as this.

In the soft violet dark that gathers under the limes, she would stand still, drinking in the fragrance of all the grasses rising from the cooling earth and listening to the triumphant laugh of the cuckoo when he found at last his mate in the thorn thicket beside her, and the call of the nightingale and all the hundred lesser voices of the wood, each summoning its mate, and would realise slowly in awed wonder that she too now was sharing in the great universal joy of the world. Sometimes also when she was with the others, and should have kept her mind free from all private thought, irresistibly the memory of some hour in the sheltered garden would come over her with such force that it absolutely shut her brain and senses to surrounding things. Once at the luncheon-table her father addressed her as she sat towards the other end and her ears were so sealed that she did not hear his voice, her eyes so fixed on the vision they saw that the figures round her, the wonder growing on all their faces as she sat immovable, like one suddenly deaf and blind, did not exist for her. It was only the sense of touch that remained true to its post, guarding the body, whence for the moment the mind, on Memory's

wings, had fled. When her sister Violet tugged at her arm to rouse her she started, and came back to herself to find the whole table gazing upon her with various degrees of amusement and surprise. She flushed scarlet, to herself the blood seemed to get into her very eyes and burn.

“ Father has spoken to you three times,” remarked Violet, “ you seem quite deaf.” Regina apologised, beneath her drooping lashes over her burning cheeks her eyes took a glance at Everest opposite her. He was smiling too. He could well guess where her thoughts had been.

After that she tried hard never to think of all this wonderful inner life she was living, except when alone, but Love was sometimes insistent and far stronger than she, and she could not always shut the door of her thoughts upon him. So one day when she was obliged to go to the village on a mission for her mother, instead of to the garden, she lost her purse, and the eighteen shillings in it, and could never remember where it slipped from her hand, though she had never lost or forgotten it in her life before.

And to Everest, also, this time was very full of emotion, charged with an intensity of feeling that was new to him, although he kept his wits about him at luncheon and did not lose his purse. There were times for him, too, when he could think of nothing but Regina, when the image of the girl came before him with an insistence that would not be denied, and swept whatever he was doing aside and claimed him for its own. He longed to have her with him and for himself; he hated the long separations that now intervened often between their meetings, though they

were in reality very good for him and helped to make the supreme delight of those moments in the garden.

The day of his departure came at length and his face grew pale and his heart beat painfully when he awoke at dawn and realised he had to leave her. It was arranged that the Rector and the two elder girls should drive him over to Stossop station in the landau, Regina being left out, as usual, of any general programme. She did not mind — their real good-byes had been exchanged yesterday under the whispering trees of the garden. An exceptionally lovely day, it was like the centre jewel on Summer's forehead in her diadem of wondrous days and nights. Warm and golden, without wind or cloud, it seemed to bless the lovers as they met in the deep hush of the sheltered spot and walked slowly, side by side, down the little narrow winding paths covered in by aloe and tamarisk and climbing giant rose towards the balustrade above the sea. How vital and life-giving was its warm salt breath as it met their faces, stealing up through the thickets, talking to them of its cool, seaweed-filled caves, of its still green pools teeming with infinite life ; and at last they came in sight of it, calm and deeply purple, swaying and heaving gently as a maiden's bosom, under a rosy golden haze, softly, very softly, traced in delicate lilac against the evening sky lay the outlines of the hills across the bay ; colour and light were jewel-like in their transparency. They approached the porphyry railing ; but Regina could not look at the soft loveliness of the scene, she could only gaze up at him, so soon to be taken from her. Oh, the ache of that parting now it had come so near. She could have gone with him, claimed him openly, spared

herself all pain. He had wished it, offered it. With a single word now she could be free from suffering, she could keep by his side. For a moment it seemed to her she must speak that word; but no, she held to her strength with both hands. Better to let him go free, better to prove to him the quality, the selflessness of her love, better to leave her fate in his hands. So she was silent, and only continued to gaze and gaze on the outline of his head, dark against the glowing sky. They leant there silent, each thinking of the first day when they had stood there, before their pact was made for meeting in solitude, before the influence of the garden had made them each other's and its own. But there was no bitterness, no regret in the thought of either. Their union had been full of magic beauty, of divine rapture, as if it had been in the Elysian fields, and they would not either of them have wished it in any way different.

When he drew her gently from the balustrade, and they turned inward again to the dark, close-roofed-in, leafy recesses of the garden, they were talking earnestly with beating hearts of the life that might spring from those dear glad hours there, and in a tiny glade, where the turf was like velvet and the great tamarisk-trees twisting and intertwining their thick branches overhead made a perfect roof, and the may-trees stood so thickly round that the nightingales were already singing there in the soft green dusk, he pressed her close to him and said one sentence that burnt into her brain and remained there as if stamped in with fire.

“ If you know it when I am away from you, do not feel frightened or oppressed, dear one. I should hate

you to feel that; write to me at once, that I may arrange for you to come to me, and for our marriage, and remember, it is my dearest wish."

Regina listened, pale, her bosom fluttering with emotion, a little overawed, but the next moment she was clinging to him passionately, trying to tell him how deep, how infinite her love for him was, and nothing could frighten her: she would only be intensely, wildly glad when she knew. The hour passed golden-edged, full of tumultuous happiness, and when at last Everest left her and walked away down the silent green road, full now of ruby light, he realized that, crowded as his life had been with experience, adventure, emotion, yet here in this garden behind him the greatest thing of all had happened to him: he had seen Divinity itself. Eros with his rainbow wings had descended to him there. To-day he was going. A subdued sadness was visible in the whole party. Only Violet, the middle sister, seemed indifferent. The Rector was kind and genial as usual, but Mrs. Marlow and Jane were notably pale and silent.

Regina stood at the Rectory door beside her mother to see the carriage start. His luggage had been sent to the station previously. Jane and Violet, in their delicate dresses, their large and shady hats, got in, and Regina thought how lovely they looked — like flowers themselves in the bright sunshine. Then he came out of the house and shook hands with her mother, and said how much he had enjoyed his visit. He was in the travelling suit she had first seen him in. He was holding his hat, and the sun poured down on his thick, dark hair and the clear pale bronze of the

perfectly modelled face. He was quite calm and natural in his bearing, and Regina knew it was due to them both that she should appear so too ; as he turned to her and held out his hand she felt all the blood surge violently to her heart ; she was as pale as white stone, otherwise not a tremor passed over her face as she gave a little smile and said good-bye, laying her hand in his. His firm warm fingers closed over it instantly, and the quick, close, iron pressure of it told her many things, and seemed to give her nerve-force and courage. He was in the carriage. Then the Rector entered, and in a few moments more the white dust of the road was rising in a cloud as the carriage rolled out on it from the Rectory garden.

Mrs. Marlow and Regina turned slowly back into the house. It seemed very still and quiet, the very air seemed to hang more heavily and with less movement now the essentially vital personality of Everest had gone. The doors of his rooms stood open as they passed by — the scent of the roses that he had always had on his table came out to them.

They passed on to Mrs. Marlow's sitting-room, which lay at the back of the Rectory, with a bow window looking out on to the garden.

"Are you going out, mother?" asked Regina, "or shall we have tea together?"

"No; I have no engagements this afternoon. Come in, and we'll have tea here. It will be late before the others get back."

Tea was brought in, and Regina, seated in the deep bay of the window, watched her mother pour it out.

"I am very sorry Mr. Lanark did not take a fancy to either of the girls," she remarked; "it would have been a splendid match for them."

"Perhaps he would if they had been more clever," hazarded Regina, in a low tone.

"Beauty is always supposed to be the great thing in a woman."

"Yes, the beauty attracts, but it does not rivet the chain it throws round the beholder. It is something else, mind or talent, that does that. In all the histories of the *grandes passions* of the world the woman has had a certain amount of beauty, of course, but she has *always* been clever too."

Mrs. Marlow looked up, surprised. Regina stirred her tea absently, gazing out into the sunlit garden.

"Well, he ought to have proposed to marry you, then," Mrs. Marlow said smilingly, without for an instant dreaming that was just what Everest had done. "You are clever enough and very pretty too."

Regina flushed rose-red and laughed. But when tea was over and she slipped away, her face was very sad again. She passed Everest's rooms on her way to her own and went in there. They stood in perfect order, just as they had been while he was in them. She took all the roses from the vases, the flowers she knew he had gathered and looked after himself, and took them away with her and went up slowly to her room. There she stood at the window looking out. It was the last day of June. He had been with them not quite a month. Three weeks she had had of absolute, unclouded happiness. There

are a few human beings who can claim that much out of the whole of their life. Now, whatever the result, whatever the price she had to pay, she would never regret, never wish one moment of that perfect time obliterated.

Day after day passed slowly by, and to the girl, after that tremendous expenditure of energy, that intense excitement, it seemed as if her life literally stood still. In the soft, sombre quiet of the monotonous Rectory days she seemed to herself to have been wrapped up in cotton wool and buried. Was it possible that people like her sleepy sister Violet, and all the other twenty-eight unmarried ladies of Stossop, could go on existing like this, twenty—thirty—forty years, their whole life? Like flashes of hot light shot from a distant furnace came Everest's letters to her; they seemed to illumine the twilight of her quiet tomb. She went to the garden whenever it was fine, and sat there and dreamed of him beneath the waving trees, or hung over the balustrade looking down on to the sea, listening to its vital whispers and picturing his image in its deep purple mirrors. Her brain felt too tired to read or to learn, she neither played nor painted any more.

For the time he became her life.

CHAPTER IV

OUT OF THE STAGNANT HARBOUR

THREE weeks after Everest had left, Regina, coming first, as usual, into the breakfast-room, saw by her plate, on the table, a letter and a small square registered packet, both directed in his handwriting. Her heart beat rapidly; a tender mist of tears rose in her eyes. A present from him! A gift from the man she loves, what a wonderful thing that is to a woman! Gifts from all the world, from kings and emperors, might move her not at all, but one little thing that *he* has chosen, has selected, sought out and bought for her, how infinitely dear it is!

Regina went up to the table, and taking the letter hastily concealed it in the bosom of her dress. Not here, but in the sacred garden, she would read it. . . . Here, it might be snatched from her and destroyed before she could do so. The packet she turned over and commenced to open. At last, from out of its silver paper and casing, the jewel lay revealed, and she stood, gazing a little awestruck at its flashing beauty.

It was a diamond star, to be worn as a brooch, and, every spike radiating from the centre diamond of great size and brilliancy, was composed of selected stones. Worked in across the star, in sapphires, were the words “Regina Imperatrix,” and

the blue and white lights from sapphire and diamond shone dazzlingly from their satin bed.

While she stood gazing at it, thinking of the care and thought he must have bestowed on it, and the colour racing across her cheeks as she felt the meaning of the word "Imperatrix" come home to her, the Rector and the rest of the family entered the room.

"Why, Regina, what's that?" the Rector asked cheerily. On the loose paper of the wrapper he recognised Everest's handwriting, and was not at all ill-pleased to see what he had sent to his daughter.

Personally, as a business matter — and everything was a business matter to the Rector — he did not care a bit which daughter it was that Everest fancied. He could only marry one, and any one would be just as good for the rest of the family. The Rector was an extremely acute individual where worldly matters were concerned, and, while the others had been really blind to what was passing so close to them, he had had a pretty good idea of the meaning of Everest's love of afternoon exercise and where his walks to the sea had taken him. In the back of his mind was the fear that it all might lead to some irregular connection, but while his code of morality for his girls was absolutely rigid where poor men might be concerned, Everest's great wealth made it suddenly grow very elastic. Regular connections sometimes grew out of irregular ones, and no connection with a rich man could be wholly bad. Hence his amiable glance on his youngest daughter as she held out to him her starry jewel.

Jane Marlow pressed up close to him. Her face

was ashy-white and seemed suddenly to line with age, so closely are age and evil allied.

"How disgraceful! Presents like that from a man! You'll make her return it, won't you, father?"

She trembled in her virtuous indignation. She could have torn the star from his hand and trampled on it.

The Rector turned to her blandly:

"Jane, don't be ridiculous. You would have been very pleased if Everest had sent it to you. And if there would be no harm in your accepting it, neither is there in Regina's case. She is quite entitled to have it and enjoy it."

Jane turned away, the muscles of her face quivering, shaken with the blackest envy and hatred from head to foot. She had so planned and hoped to win this man for herself. In all her low-nerved, weakly, doll-like body there was not a single pulse or fibre, which could tremble to the music of love. But, like her father, she was dominated by intensely worldly instincts, and to be married to a man of wealth and position, no matter what the individual, was her dream and her constant obsession by night and day, the only thing that filled her little atrophied soul.

Everest's looks she had hardly seen, of his personality she never thought, but night by night she dreamed of herself, sitting in motor or carriage, driving to some great house, where, resplendent in jewels, she would pass amongst the crowd admiring her beauty.

And she had so tried to please him. . . . She had taken him to her poor, and let him see how char-

itable and devoted, and domestic she was. She had taken him to church, and knelt so devoutly, and yet so prettily, and in such becoming dresses, before him, at the communion-table; she had never let any frivolous or unseemly word pass her lips to him; she had never, while he was there, quarrelled with her sisters or abused her mother. She had been the perfect, pure, sedate Rector's daughter, and he had seemed lately to appreciate it. . . . *Regina?* . . . What had she done? . . . She had been just as she always was. She had taken no trouble, but it seemed now it was she who would have the motor and the jewels, and live in town, while Jane would be left to grow mouldy in the horrid old Rectory! It was too much! . . . She could not control herself! . . . She burst into a flood of angry tears, and rushed out of the room as the Rector was beginning to say grace.

When grace was over, *Regina* fastened the star at her neck, and her sister *Violet* sat staring at it, in a dull solid way, through the meal. In her heavy, apathetic mind she had recognised early that *Everest* was not for her, and in some dim, instinctive way she was not dissatisfied that it was so. He alarmed her. To her, with her fishlike circulation, and her unused brain, the sense of virile strength and power about him, which so delighted *Regina*, brought oppression. His experiences, his brilliant intellect, his knowledge, put him outside the circle of her stupid little thoughts.

She could not understand one-tenth of his conversation with *Regina*, nor follow what he said, and his presence, his glance only, vaguely frightened and confused her. Great things are for great people, and little things for little people, and *Violet*, during

Everest's visit, had begun to realise dimly that, if a fine marriage meant belonging to an incomprehensible and terrifying individual like this, the idle novel-reading, the church-going, the humdrum little potter of home life, were more suited to her mental and physical equipment. So she stared at the brooch without any deep resentment, only the general sisterly dislike that Regina should have any present at all.

After breakfast Regina slipped away, and in the heat of the morning sun walked to the garden, as fast as her swift-moving feet would carry her, and once beyond its magic gate took out the dear letter, and with beating heart unfolded it.

“ **MY DARLING**,—I miss you so much, and want to have you in my arms again. I send you a little brooch I have had made for you, my Empress. I went about our flat, yesterday, as soon as I got back from Scotland. I have a good one in view, and will let you know as soon as it is ready for you. Only these few lines now, as I have so much to do.

“ Till we meet again, my sweet.

“ **EVEREST.**”

When she had read it more than a hundred times, lingering over each word, she kissed it and slipped it back in her bodice.

Everest had referred to the flat before. In all his letters there had been the same eager, impatient note: he wanted her, and whether she chose to marry him or not she was to join him in London. He would take a flat, and as soon as it was ready he

hoped she would come, as he could not go on living without her. He left everything in her hands. If she would like him to come down, with a special licence in his pocket-book, and marry her from the Rectory, he would do that, if not, she must come to him. He would prefer to write to her father about their engagement. . . . Might he do that? Whatever she decided, she was to remember he could not exist without her. . . . Several letters of this sort had reached her from Scotland, and had carried to her heart the extreme of happiness. She had not answered very definitely. She did not wish to curtail his time in Scotland by fixing dates herself. When he was back in town some wish of his would develop itself, and she would follow that.

The same afternoon she spent in her room. She locked herself in and then got out all her paintings, and went slowly over them in review.

She knew they were very good. Everest, the only person who had seen them, had said so, but that would have made no difference to her. She would not have believed it unless her own intuitive knowledge had told her so. Sometimes she had done bad work, but she had known it instantly, and destroyed it, as relentlessly as the all-wise animals destroy their ill-made or imperfect offspring. All that had survived was fit to live, and she sat in the centre of her pictures, looking from one to the other in a glow of delight.

Genius comes into the world not to learn, but to teach, and that is what the commonplace mind cannot grasp.

It will insist that everything must be taught, for-

getting that at some time there could not have been any teacher. The question: Which came first, the hen or the egg? might well be asked of those people. . . . Which came first: the teacher or the taught?

As a matter of fact, genius knows no teacher but the divine force within that guides, directs, accomplishes all.

And Regina, leaning rocking on her bedroom chair, in the middle of the sheets of white paper that she had converted into living, joy-giving things, her slender hands clasped round her knees, knew that, whatever happened, she need never starve, never be dependent on anyone, never ask anything from anyone, as long as her fingers kept their cunning and her eyes their sight. As she sat there, the thought suddenly darted into her mind that it was Saturday, and unless she wrote to Everest before the London post left he could not have her acknowledgment of the brooch until Monday.

She sprang up, found her writing materials, and wrote.

It was only a few paces down the road to a letter-box, and, knowing it could not take her more than a second or two to reach it, she did not stay to lock up her work, as usual.

She ran down the stairs without her hat, and across the garden, to the highroad. The letter-box had been cleared when she reached it, but she knew she could overtake the old postman and get to the post office before he arrived, or give him the letter on the road. She went on with flying feet, but she had to traverse the whole distance to the village post before she came up with him. She saw him put the

precious missive in his bag, then she turned homeward, eager to get back to her pictures.

When she came back she went up to her own room. On opening the door she look round, surprised. Her pictures, that she had left scattered about, on chair and easel, were not visible anywhere.

Her first thought was that the maid, in clearing up the room, had laid them all together, and put them away somewhere. She opened one drawer, and then another, but without finding them.

Then, with a suddenly anxiously beating heart, she looked round the room again. A side-table caught her eye, and on it — what was that strange mass of ragged-edged paper piled there? She crossed to it. Her pictures were there, or the torn fragments of them, destroyed beyond hope of recovery, and on the top of the broken heap lay her Bible.

Bewildered, distracted, hardly realising what had happened, Regina laid the book aside and took up first one mutilated sheet, and then another, scanning them with staring eyes. Each one had been torn across and then across again many times, and roughly, so that the edges were violently jagged. . . . Nothing of beauty remained, except the wonderful colours; the scraps of softly brilliant tints even in their hopeless destruction had a confused loveliness.

Regina's fingers trembled more and more as she turned them over. All the blood had left her face; it was ashy, convulsed. Who could have done it? It seemed the act of a child or a maniac. Months of patient, untiring work, buoyed up by hopes and anticipation of success and the joy of creation, had

been undone in a few moments. When it came home to her that not one of these precious children that she had so loved and rejoiced in, that had been her constant companions and comforters through days and weeks, remained to her, a slow sort of agony took possession of her, that was so intense it seemed it must kill her. Gasping, she sat down on a chair, holding the rim of the table and staring at its contents.

Jane and Violet Marlow were sitting together that afternoon in a small boudoir they shared between them, when suddenly the door was opened, Regina appeared on the threshold, deadly white, and with black and kindling eyes.

“Have you, either of you, been to my room and destroyed my pictures?” she asked. Her tones were like the scrape of steel against iron. Both the girls looked up, one from the novel she was reading, the other from the band of silk she was embroidering. Regina knew in that first second, in that first upward glance of surprise and dismay, that they were not the guilty ones.

“Oh, Regina!” was all they could either find to say, but the accent in it of genuine horror was enough for her quick ears. Both girls knew how Regina loved and valued her paintings, and some dim conception of her suffering came home to them as they looked at her distorted face.

“Someone has,” she returned. “Where’s mother?”

“In the linen-room,” Violet answered, and Regina turned away, closing the door behind her. Her feet hardly touched the ground as she went down to the

linen-room. She opened the door and found Mrs. Marlow sitting before the huge linen cupboard, her lap full of damask tablecloths she was sorting.

“Mother, someone has destroyed all my pictures. . . . Is it you?”

Mrs. Marlow looked up in surprise.

Regina stood in the doorway, rigid, white as a statue, her face haggard and drawn. In that moment it resembled so much another countenance that Mrs. Marlow had seen bend over her in a last farewell that the woman stared back at her daughter almost as pallid. Usually, when Regina recalled to her those dear past hours of delight Mrs. Marlow resented it and felt angered by this living witness to dead things, but to-day had been the anniversary, not of Regina’s birth, but of her conception, and all day Mrs. Marlow had been struggling in the clinging arms of memories that would not be denied. She had fled to the linen cupboard, and counted the damask cloths again and again, aloud, in vain, to stop them, and now, when like an apparition the very face of her lover came before her vision, the woman’s struggling soul fainted and called to it.

She almost stretched out her arms to her, letting the linen fall heavily to the floor in her sudden movement. She would have liked Regina to lay her head down on her breast and sob out her anguish there, as *he* once had done.

But Regina, never having been accustomed to affection or caresses in her home, naturally did not understand the gesture: she only repeated her question, standing by the door:

“Dear child, no,” returned Mrs. Marlow. “De-

stroy your paintings! I should not think of such a thing. . . . No one would. Surely it must be some accident. I am so sorry!"

"I don't think it is an accident," Regina answered, retreating. "Thank you, mother, very much."

She withdrew and went on down the flight of stairs. Her whole body was quivering in physical agony, transmitted from the mind; her brain seemed bursting. As she reached the hall she saw the footman come out of her father's study and close the door gently. He saw Regina approaching it, hesitated, and then said respectfully:

"Master said he wished not to be disturbed, that he was going to write his sermon."

Regina pursued her way, and laid her hand on the door.

"Thank you, Williams, but I am afraid I must disturb him for a few moments."

Williams went on his way, wondering what was the matter with his young mistress.

"She looked like a person as has been taking some of them deadly poisons," he remarked at the servants' tea, and Williams was very near the truth, for the action of all fierce anger is to distil a corroding poison within ourselves, which infects the whole current of the blood.

When the girl entered the study the Rector was sitting at his desk, by the far window, sheets of manuscript paper lying before him. He looked up, as the door opened, and when he saw who it was that had entered his eyebrows contracted, and he made an authoritative gesture for her to withdraw.

But Regina advanced steadily, with the grim, re-

morseless step of the hunting beast of prey. When she was close to the desk she stopped. Her eyes glittered in the deadly white of her face.

“Was it you who tore up my paintings?”

Unconsciously, the Rector looked round for help or assistance. Some primitive, physical instinct warned him he was near death at that moment, though such a thought never came near his mind. His eyes came back from their search round the empty room and from the far-off bell. He fidgeted with his pen, and then said nervously:

“You see, Regina, I have to think of your moral good. . . . I . . . er, can’t let things go on in my house of which I . . . ah . . . of which my conscience does not approve.”

“Then that means you did destroy them?”

She was very near the desk now, the waning light of the afternoon fell upon her face. The Rector thought he had never seen such a terrible look of rage on any countenance before. It was truly shocking. . . . These human passions were really dreadful, when you came face to face with them.

“I considered it my duty,” he returned. “I laid your Bible on them to show you what actuated me.”

Then he had done it! This was the man who had torn to pieces that fabric of beauty she had built up with such tender, adoring care, into which she had woven so many hopes.

A gust of fury enveloped her, so that she shook from head to foot. The lust to kill, to murder him, rushed upon her like a great beast and gripped her, shook her in its teeth, till all grew black and red be-

fore her. She gripped the mahogany chair back, by which she stood, till the knuckles started out on the back of her hands, white and shining.

But the instinct of her strong mentality was to elucidate the mystery, to search out the clue to this bewildering act, that she could not in the least understand.

“Why did you do it?” she asked.

The Rector unconsciously bent under the penetrating will of the query.

“Because they were improper — most improper pictures to have in a clergyman’s house.”

“Improper?” Regina stared at him in a blank amaze that for the moment eclipsed the welling tide of passion. Had her father suddenly become mad? Was that the solution of the mystery? She had yet to realise that there is no madness so blinding, so deadly, so destructive, as the craze of the impure mind against all artistic creations.

“They were landscapes, sunsets . . . the most beautiful things I could find . . . the skies, the effects of light. . . . What do you mean?” she continued, and again the Rector felt compelled to stand her cross-examination and reply.

That same primitive impulse of self-preservation that had stirred within him at his daughter’s approach warned him now, without his thinking about it, that his sole safety lay in the defence and explanation, such as it was, that he had to make.

“Yes, of course, they were landscapes. . . . But there is a way of treating even a landscape, so that it becomes objectionable. I have never seen such things before, myself. Those staring, red skies,

those flushed appearances, those twisted black trees, those dark, slimy pools. . . . I really cannot tell you the unpleasant things they suggest. . . .

“Those stormy heaths and wind-tossed foliage seem to me to typify the riot of the passions, and those mossy banks in the sun suggest sensuality. . . . Improper? Yes; highly improper I consider them!”

Regina stood listening wide-eyed, in sheer, paralysed amazement. That a person’s mind could be so deformed and twisted that by its own blackness it could defile the innocent beauty and sweetness of a landscape was a fact so new to her, and so astounding, that she felt stunned by it.

That the man before her was speaking honestly she saw.

“But these things are just portraits of what we see about us,” she went on, after a silence, her clear, logical mind battling with the psychological problem before her. “If the landscapes were improper, then so must the things be. What do you do when you go out and see a sunset sky?”

“If it suggests to me unsatisfactory thoughts, I don’t look at it.”

“But how *can* it?” queried the girl passionately. “When I see the sunset sky I feel I am being borne away on invisible wings to paradise; and these mossy banks, with the gold light lying on them, they are exquisite, and they are all around here. . . . You can’t go out without seeing them.”

“Don’t continue talking like that, Regina. I have told you, when I go for my walks, if I see anything likely to disturb my moral sense I turn my

eyes away; and because there are many dangerous and attractive things in nature about us, that is no reason why we should portray them and bring them into the home for constant contemplation."

Regina's haggard eyes looked blankly back at him. He was talking to her in an unknown language she could not understand; telling her incredible things she could not believe, for her own mind was bright and clear, crystal-like as a mirror, reflecting everything it faced with added beauty; diamond-like in its sharp, unstainable purity. And the obfuscated, turbid, sensual mass of incoherent ideas and thoughts that represented this man's mind appalled her, as she looked into it.

"If you destroyed the landscapes only because you thought them immoral, why did you tear up the interior of Exeter Cathedral? There could be no harm in that. . . ."

"That was the worst of all," answered the Rector stormily, moving his papers angrily before him; "the very worst! Of course it was the cathedral, and a very beautiful picture it might have made, treated properly, in the daylight, and full of worshippers; but there again, you had got it nearly in darkness — the evening effect you would call it, I suppose; the interior was quite dusky, and a red light was coming through the chancel window. A very unpleasant suggestion was there, very. . . . And still further enhanced by the solitude. . . . The place was practically empty."

"What was the suggestion, please?" asked Regina, completely bewildered now by the attack on this picture of all others, and dazed by her wander-

ing in the mazes of another and wholly alien mind. She still clung to the idea that she must grip hold of the keynote of these mysteries somehow.

The Rector fiddled with his paper and coughed, then he said, in his pulpit manner:

“ You must not forget, Regina, that all people are not like you. It may be quite possible that you have painted that picture innocently, but you must think about others, in all these things, and consider their weaknesses. I have no hesitation in saying that that painting, if put before young people, might do great, very great, harm.”

“ But how? I am only asking you how? ”

“ Well . . . er . . . don’t you see for yourself how the darkness, and the quiet, and the solitude might . . . er . . . suggest to the young people of both sexes how a cathedral might . . . ah . . . serve them for . . . er . . . er . . . immoral conduct with each other? ”

Regina’s hands dropped from the chair back to her sides, with a gesture of collapse; her face grew even more white than it had been, as the surprise of this amazing interpretation of her sacred work forced the blood to her heart.

“ No, I don’t see,” she said, with a steel-like hardness in her voice, “ nor do I believe for one instant that any young people would or could think such things. But if they were so utterly depraved and vicious as that, nothing could hurt them, certainly not my water-colour of the cathedral. In any case, whatever you thought or felt about them, you had no right to destroy them in my absence. It was an abominable thing to do! ”

"Nonsense! As a father, I have every right to act for your good. As a matter of fact, the pictures so annoyed me I lost my self-control, and tore them up as soon as I saw them."

Regina made a sudden forward step and seized his arm. The grip of those slim, white fingers seemed to go down to the bone, and the Rector gave an exclamation of pain.

"Do you know that it's fortunate for you," her white lips said at his ear, "that I have more control than you have, or I should *kill* you now."

She let go his arm, turned from him and crossed the room. She knew she must go or she would spring upon him and destroy him, as he had destroyed her work; anger in that moment filled her with the strength to do it.

Once in her room she locked the door and sat down over by the window, locking her hands together and forcing them down on the window-sill, like one in mortal agony. Never had she felt before the in-rush of evil upon the soul, but she knew it now. She longed to avenge herself; longed to murder. Her nature was sweet and gentle and pure; her mind always occupied with elevated things; the emotions of malice, of hate, of envy, of cruelty were unknown to her. They never rose in her. But now she was lost, submerged in this awful tide of black hate, that rolled over her, and she struggled in it, powerless to help herself.

"Kill him! . . . kill him! . . . kill him! . . . If I go out of this room, if I see him again, I shall do it."

She struggled vainly to get calmer, to take her

eyes from the torn and mutilated beauty on the table near her, vainly. . . .

The passion of fury seethed in all her veins, it seemed a bodily as well as a mental thing. She knotted her hands and unknotted them in an agony, trying to throw from her this evil, hateful thing, this anger that was parching her lips and closing her throat and corroding her brain.

In that supreme suffering the thought came to her suddenly of Everest, and his face, that serene, beautiful, perfect face she so passionately adored, floated before her darkened eyes, as if he were in the room with her. The remembrance of their love, its exquisite tenderness, stole upon her softly. How could she let its shrine — her mind and body — be so invaded by these other revolting emotions?

She strove still harder not to think of her father, not to think of his act, not to remember her ruined work. . . . And then came the query: "Why not go to him? To Everest? He wanted her. . . . No one here did. . . .

He was back in London now; if she went to him he would be only too happy. Had he not said so a hundred times? Her hand went to her neck, and touched the jewel star. On her breast was his note, showing he was planning, wishing for her coming.

If, in any way, he was not ready, not prepared, not desirous to receive her, she could stay alone for a little while. She had her own capital in her pictures. But no — now, she had no pictures, and the black tide of rage rolled up again to its full height and seemed to tower over her, but she grappled and fought, and wrenched back her calm again.

Her capital was in her brain, and no one could take that from her. If she herself did not let that poisonous anger sap it. . . .

Suddenly a tap came at the door. Regina drew herself up, her whole body quivered.

"Yes," she answered, from her place by the window.

"Are you not coming down to dinner?" sounded in her elder sister's voice through the door.

"No, thank you; not this evening."

"Why? Aren't you well?"

"I have rather a headache. Do not wait for me, nor send me anything up. I shall be better without it."

"Oh . . . well, father sent me up to say you were not to feel distressed about your pictures, that he had no objection to your learning to paint, if you wanted to and showed talent. It was your *style* he disliked, and if you would give up your red skies and things, and take simple, proper subjects — country cottages and village greens, you know, that sort of thing — he would arrange for you to have lessons from Mr. Andrews, the drawing-master at the Kindergarten."

Silence.

"Did you hear, Regina? What shall I say to father?"

"Thank him for his kind offer."

"How strange your voice sounds! Won't you open the door?"

"No; it might be dangerous for you."

"Dangerous? What do you mean?"

"Well . . . er . . . you see, there's a draught."

"Very good. I'm going down. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Footsteps moved away from the door, and down the stairs.

Then there was silence.

Regina sprang to her feet, every muscle within her shaking, every pulse throbbing with exasperation.

Only one instinct moved her now: to escape, to get away from this hateful place, that called itself her home, to get away from this atmosphere of tyranny, that called itself religion, to get away from this licentiousness of cruelty and ignorance, that called itself purity.

She turned to her handbag and packed it rapidly, with cold, trembling fingers. Then put on a hat and veil, and threw her cloak over her arm; for an instant she stood before her mirror, and looked in; the beautiful rose and white skin, the masses of soft hair, framed in her large black summer hat, pleased her; the luminous eyes, large now with excitement and pain, shadowed with apprehension of the unknown, to which she was going, looked back at her; but, dark as the waters of Life might be before her, vague and uncertain and mysterious, she felt all the danger and evil that might lie in that treacherous sea could not equal the horror of the stagnant harbour from which she was setting out.

She turned from the glass and paused, listening: the dinner-gong sounded harshly through the house; when its echoes died away the sound of plates being carried and doors opened and shut came to her faintly. The family had gone in to dine on the stalled ox, with hatred.

She opened her door and passed noiselessly, unnoticed, down the stairs. How glad she felt that never again would she have to sit down to that depressing, grumbling, bickering, recriminatory meal! Softly she opened the hall door, and went out into the sweet, warm evening.

It seemed to welcome her, enfold her, soothe her. She glanced up at the deep rose of the light-filled sky and thought how sweetly it must be arching over the enchanted garden.

Never again might she see it perhaps, but its influence would be with her all her life. Its peace and beauty, its mystery, the holy love she had felt there, the hours of rapture she had known there, had all moulded her soul and stamped on it an impress that could never be effaced.

Quickly, without a backward glance at the Rectory, she walked through the still, dewy air towards Stossop station.

CHAPTER V

CLEAR WATERS

EVEREST was undressing, he had already taken off his coat and waistcoat, and was standing in front of his long mirror, unfastening his collar, when he heard light, quick footsteps outside, and the handle of his sitting-room door turn. With one hand still on his neck stud, he walked through the communicating doors of his rooms, to see who was the intruder, and came face to face with *Regina*, as she entered. The moment her eyes fell on the adored figure the stony self-command she had resolutely kept wrapped round her tightly, like a garment, fell from her, there was no need of it here. . . . Everest stretched out his arms to her and she fell into them, in a sudden passion of tears.

“ My pictures, my pictures ! ”

Her head leaned against his breast, her whole body quivered convulsively, with great, tearing sobs, in his arms. He held her close pressed to him, asking no question, kissing her soft hair, and the rim of her little ear, waiting. . . .

“ He tore them all up,” she sobbed, after some minutes, “ because he disapproved of them, and I came away, because I felt I should kill him if I stayed there. . . . Oh, Everest ! what a thing it is to be made to feel like that, submerged in evil ! ”

“Who tore them up?” he asked, as she raised her head. His voice had a tone of horror in it.

“My father; he went into my room while I was away, saw the pictures and took them all and destroyed them; because he thought it was right, he told me. . . . Can you believe it?”

“Hardly,” Everest muttered: his face had grown as white as hers.

“What an atrocious thing to do! What a regular old John Calvin! Darling, darling, I am sorry! What can I do to comfort you?”

“I am comforted already, being here,” she answered, drawing away from him, and smiling through her tears, as she looked up at him. “Oh, if you knew what a relief it is to be with you, and to feel that blackness of hate vanishing out of one’s mind, and the feelings of love rushing back into it! For six hours now, since this happened, I did not know myself. . . . I have been a murderer in heart. . . . I was devoured with hate of him. The thought of you was the only thing that saved me, that shone like a star in the darkness. The thought of *you*, that stole through all the mists of murder and hate, and brought me here safely. He owes his life to you. . . .”

Everest’s face grew very grave as he drew her closer to him.

“I am so glad you came to me,” he said gently. “I like to think you brought your grief to me, and also I was wishing for you so much, for myself. . . . We can be very happy here.”

“But I don’t think I can stay. . . . Can I?” she

said doubtfully. "Really, Everest, I don't want to be any trouble to you. You may not be ready for me. You were not prepared for me to come now. I felt I must see you at once, but I have a little money with me, and I can go to an hotel, can't I, and stay there by myself?"

Everest laughed and kissed her, looking down upon her with that wonderful softening of all the brilliant face that moved her so.

"Yes, you could certainly do that if I allowed it," he answered, "which I shall not do. You can perfectly well stay here with me. These are my own private rooms, where I do exactly as I please. I have my studio here too, and I always count this my happiest place in town, where I am free and alone, and no one bothers me. How did you come? Have you got any luggage?"

"I drove here in a taxi from the station, and I have only a handbag. I felt I must get away from the Rectory and the possibility of losing my senses and killing him. But I had no idea of forcing myself on you; I want to be quiet for a day or two somewhere, and paint a picture that came into my mind in the train. That will take away this dreadful longing for revenge. Then you could help me, couldn't you, to get it sold? You said I could always sell my things. I do not want ever, ever, to go home again!"

"Darling, why should you? Your home is with me now. As for the picture, if you want to paint, there is my studio, through that door. You can work in it all day undisturbed, and sell your picture,

I have not any doubt, if you wish to. But now, you shall have something to eat: you must have left before dinner."

Regina sank down in one of the large and truly easy chairs. Suddenly she felt weak and cold and faint. For many hours that worst of all fevers, scorching hate and anger, had burnt in her veins, eating up her strength. For the time she was exhausted.

"We must go and get you some supper directly," Everest said, regarding her anxiously. "Sit still till I come." And he turned back into his bedroom, to put on his coat again.

"You were just going to bed. I am sorry to disturb you, and drag you out again!"

For all answer, she heard him laugh from the inner room. In a few moments he came back to her. She looked up with a sudden exclamation.

He had put on a light overcoat, a white silk handkerchief round his neck, and his opera hat.

"Everest, I have never seen you like that! How wonderful you look! — so very handsome in that hat! I have never seen you in it before."

"No, one doesn't wear them in the country," rejoined Everest, laughing. "You are the most awful little flatterer I ever knew. If I live much with you, I shall get vain in time. Come along now, you look so white. You ought to get something to eat, and then go to bed and to sleep as soon as you can."

They went downstairs to the waiting taxi, and Everest ran up again with her handbag, and set it inside his own room, with a gust of pleasure sweeping over him.

As he got into the taxi, he told the man to drive to the West Strand telegraph office.

"We must send word to your father," he said, when he was seated by her, "and let them know you are safe."

He saw her face grow still whiter in the shadows of the cab.

"Why? They don't care a straw about me, any of them. Why am I obliged to tell them what I am doing?"

"Think how anxious they will be when they find you are not in the house, after the picture question especially! They might think you had drowned yourself, or anything."

"They would not much care if I had! But they will probably think I am with you."

"Well, I wish them to know it," returned Everest, so decidedly that Regina felt silenced.

When they reached the telegraph office he got out, leaving her in the cab, and sent the wire to John Marlow:

"Regina is with me and quite safe.—EVEREST."

He reflected for a moment with it in his hand.

It would make talk and gossip in the village, but he did not see how he could help it.

Sooner or later he would have to meet John Marlow's inquiries about his daughter, and he wished from the very beginning to have had no deception, nor concealment of his own actions. He sent the message and rejoined the waiting girl.

It was too late for diners, and still early for sup-

per-parties, so that the restaurant, when they entered it, was nearly empty.

Everest chose a quiet corner by a sheltering palm and screen, and the girl sank down on the velvet-covered seat, beneath the rose-shaded light, with a feeling of soothed contentment. It is a great thing to come unexpectedly to one we love, and find ourselves utterly and wholly and delightfully welcome. She saw this was so. She felt in every fibre of her being the reflex action of the passionate electric joy that was animating the man opposite her, under his quiet exterior. A warm colour glowed in his clear skin; the dark eyes were full of life and fire; he smiled a little, unconsciously, whenever he looked at her. He was so tender and kind and devoted, so full of all that curious magnetic charm that passion, when not thwarted, checked, too far repressed, or in any way distorted, confers upon the male. She felt borne on a tide of deep, peaceful happiness; she seemed to be floating gently on that warm and buoyant flood. She was with him, and he loved and wanted her, and nothing else in the world mattered.

Everest ordered a delicate little supper for them, and made her drink, in champagne, the health of her new picture, which was to start to-morrow.

The colour crept back to her face, and fresh strength into her limbs. The beautiful emotions of grateful love and trust and joy were rapidly mending the great rents that hate and evil had torn in her system.

“Are you feeling better now?” he asked, as they finished their coffee, gazing at her. She looked very sweet, very youthful and appealing, he thought, her

face shadowed by the large hat, in the soft light. The pain and excitement she had been through had lent a look of spiritual delicacy to her face, widened the eyes, dilating enormously the pupils. The skin was pale and very clear, the lips a bright line of scarlet.

“Are you ready? Shall we go home now?”

Regina gazed back at him, a sudden wonder on her face.

“How nice that sounds, when you say it — home; and I have always so hated the word!”

Everest laughed and rose. He felt impatient to have her in his arms and kiss her, which he did the moment they were in the taxi, driving back from the restaurant.

“I am so grateful to you for being so sympathetic and sweet to me, altogether, when I came to you suddenly, like this,” she said in his ear, with her arms round his neck, and he held her very closely as he answered:

“Darling, it is I that am grateful to you, for coming to me, when I wanted you so much. I am so glad you found me in.” And he was silent for a moment remembering the conflict he had had with himself, before he had decided to stay in and go to bed early, that night, at the studio.

It was only the picture of the enchanted garden that had held him. He stood looking at it for a long time, and as the remembrance of those radiant hours he had passed there came back to him he only longed for Regina. Nothing else could satisfy or content him. He must insist on her joining him at once, and until she came to him he would wait. And then, just as his resolve was made, her hand was on his

door and she herself appeared! Just as he was longing for her so much! And he felt he could not welcome her, kiss her, be grateful to her enough.

When they reached his rooms again Regina said: "I should so like to begin my picture to-morrow, but I haven't any materials with me, and to-morrow is Sunday. . . . I can't buy them anywhere, can I?"

Everest walked across the sitting-room and unlocked the door at the end. This led into the studio. He turned on the light and called her to follow him.

"Here is everything, either for oil or water-colours. You can use this easel," and he lifted a half-finished canvas from one of the easels, and set it on the floor. "All the paints and brushes you will find in that drawer, and the drawing paper in the large drawer underneath."

Regina looked round her with pleasure. It was a large and well-furnished studio; comfort and ease and every facility for work was everywhere.

"What a delightful place," she said; "and full of your work. I want you to show it all to me."

"I will some time, but not now," Everest answered, drawing her out of the room with an arm she could not resist, and closing the door after them. "Come into my room, and see your own picture, that was safely with me when the others came to grief."

He opened his bedroom door, and the girl, with a feeling of awed delight, crossed the threshold of his room.

If anything could have added to the worship which filled her for this man it was the sight of that beauti-

ful room, in which he slept and, as he said, dreamt and thought about her.

She hated disorder of any kind, and finding it difficult to be always tidy and orderly in her surroundings, herself, owing to her impetuous, unmethodical nature, she specially admired the gift for order in another.

She hated old, untidy clothes, hated the sight of anything that looked torn or used or worn, and was fairly familiar with such things in the Rectory bedrooms, since any clothes are considered good enough for the country and home. Here, having taken Everest completely by surprise, she saw nothing that offended her. All was in perfect order, every object that met the eye was one of beauty and spoke of refinement and elegance.

The centre table had flowers upon it, and an open leather writing-case, where he had written his last letter to her, the previous evening. A bookcase, low and convenient, stood by a long chair covered with a blue silk rug. There seemed no clothes anywhere—doubtless they were all ranged neatly in those many wardrobes, standing against the walls—except a deep blue dressing-gown, thrown over an arm-chair, and the silk sleeping-suit lying on his bed.

His dressing-table was really beautiful in its appointments, and the girl's eyes rested with delight on his silver brushes and mirrors and razors and scissors and buttonhooks.

It was all charming; it breathed order, beauty and peace; for a spirit of peace is largely the result of order. Although not perhaps generally recognised, nothing fatigues the eye and mind and body more

than disordered surroundings, the broken lines of a crowded and untidy room.

Regina had heard much of the supposed ugliness and untidiness of bachelors' apartments, much also about the feminine touch and the refinement to be found in a maiden's room. But this, the first bachelor's room she had ever entered, in its stately order, compared amazingly with the many rooms of girls and women that she had seen.

Everest drew her over to the mantelpiece.

"There is your picture," he said, and she gave an exclamation of delight as she saw it.

It stood on his mantel, in a handsome double-swept frame, with plate-glass before it, and looked as if the greatest care had been expended on it, which it had.

She was surprised at the beauty of the work, now she came upon it suddenly. The enchanted garden, in all its beauty, bloomed before her, beneath its soft, crimson sky.

"How well it looks in its frame!" she said; "how perfectly you have had it done!"

"It is a dear picture," he answered her. "It is my guardian angel. It kept me here to-night, for you."

Then he took off her hat, and put it on his table, and her cloak, and drew her into his arms, and kissed her, but very softly and tenderly, for, while she felt an absolute adoration for him, he had also for her an overwhelming reverence, and these feelings, animating them both, carried their love far above the range of common, earthly things.

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The next morning Everest wrote to the Rector:

“ MY DEAR JOHN,—Last night Regina came here in a very excited state. She was very much upset about her pictures. She is now staying with me, and if you can feel enough confidence in me to let things stand just as they are for the present, I think they will work out all right. I offered to marry her, while I was still at Stossop, but, acting on some quixotic idea that our positions were too unequal, she refused me, and continues to do so. I have no doubt, however, I shall be able in time to persuade her into granting me what is my dearest wish.

“ Best say as little as possible at present of the matter; but where necessary you can, if you wish, give out we are already married. Yours always,

“ EVEREST.”

He sent this letter when they had had their morning coffee, which he made himself, and after Regina had gone into the studio and settled down to her work.

She was nervous, trembling with a sort of inward palpitation, which so often precedes intense effort, and he knew the only way to calm her was to let her produce as soon as possible the ideas burning within her.

She worked all day, never once pausing to eat or drink. Everest, knowing her intense preoccupation, and anxious to see her freed from the feverish tension possessing her, went away to his club, and then on to the new flat, leaving her alone, and thus free to work all the hours of light.

At five he returned, and as he opened the door of

their sitting-room she rushed to him and kissed him passionately.

“It is done! It is finished! Come and look!” And she drew him over to the studio, and to the window, where the picture stood, facing the last western light, on the easel.

Everest almost started as his eyes fell on it. Its realism was so tremendous. The passion and the fury of it seemed to strike the spectator like a blow. It was a great picture, but horrible! — horrible as its title, written in glittering letters of gold paint, beneath it: “The Murderer.”

Over a plain of snow, snow that covered foreground, middle distance and distance alike, one limitless, hostile plain, hurried a single figure, a fugitive, cowering figure, the folds of whose heavy coat, torn back by the merciless wind, revealed a face in which fear and every hideous, malignant emotion known to humanity struggled together. Behind him glowed, blood-red, a crimson sky, the light from which, exquisitely handled, by a truly master-hand, fell all across the snowy plain and caught and tinged with scarlet the foot-tracks the wretched wayfarer had left behind him; footsteps of bood indeed they seemed.

Awe-inspiring, terrible, fascinating, great in its grip of its horrible subject, the picture wounded, satisfied, attracted and repelled all at the same instant.

Everest turned from it to her and drew her into his arms. “I think it is a very, very great thing,” he said gently.

“He murdered my pictures and I longed to murder him. I have lived, and slept, and lain down and

got up with murder ever since. But now, it is over. I have exorcised the demon. It is all there in the picture. I have put it into that, and got rid of it. I am free again. Also I am content, happy again!" And she smiled up at him, the light of love and joy all rippling over her face. "It is greater than any you saw at Stossop, better than any he tore up, is it not?" she asked. "That's why I feel I can forgive him; he tore up all those, but then, his action inspired this, which is greater, so I am not really injured, after all. Besides, all that fire and rage and passion I felt seemed to be like a smelter, in which my talent found itself, gathered itself together, freed itself from all its dross of weakness or indecision, and flowed out in its true mould. I shall paint better now, always, I think, than I did."

She was wonderfully attractive to him in her excitement and enthusiasm. That great energy that was in his own system seemed roused and called into its full life by the display of it in another.

She was quite white, after her long fast, and her eyes shone like great lights in her face. He could feel all the muscles of her arms tremble, beneath the smooth surface of the skin, as he held them.

He had seen women before in all stages of excitement, induced by wine and physical emotions, but this was totally different; this joyous, passionate, mental elation that seemed rushing through her veins and pouring from every cell of her slender, supple, beautiful body, into his own.

As in the enchanted garden, she seemed less an ordinary woman to him than some immortal, with all the fires of Olympus in her intoxicating kiss. He

had grudged those hours of the dull, uninteresting Sunday that he had spent alone, while she was engaged in her work, but this was worth it!—this moment of his home-coming, to her embrace, and the hour which followed, when the painting was shut up alone, in the cold studio, and he drew all her joyous passion, her ardent energy, to himself!

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When the Rector received Everest's letter, which he did the following afternoon, alone in his study, his face was a complex reflection of the emotions of joy and surprise. He knew that Regina was extremely unworldly (foolish, he considered), but that unselfishness or disinterestedness could take any girl so far as to refuse Everest was something his mind could hardly grasp. . . . So Everest had been immensely taken with her! That was just what he had thought. . . . And he had actually proposed to her! . . . And then, the little imbecile had refused him!

He never doubted a single word in the letter; the two men knew each other and understood each other perfectly, and he felt sure what Everest had written was the absolute truth.

He sat, absently playing with the sheet of paper a long time, thinking. As things were now, he could not certainly do any good by interfering. He could only hope that Regina would abandon her idiotic attitude before Everest's passion cooled. Her duty, of course, was to do, as every good woman does: tie up the man firmly, while in a state of helpless intoxication, so that when he recovers his senses he may be rigidly bound, and none of his struggles to escape can

avail him anything. This leaving him free until he was sane again was a most immoral and silly idea. However, there it was, and Regina had wonderful brains, intellectually, though she was such a fool about her own interests; she was just the sort of girl to keep a man like Everest in love with her. It might turn out very well.

To her mother he had better state the case as it was; to the girls he should say, he thought, that their sister was married. Regina's flight had not occasioned much stir at the Rectory, for it had not been discovered till the following morning, and then almost simultaneously with the arrival of Everest's telegram. Jane had cried all the morning over this final destruction of her hopes, and had not appeared at luncheon; Violet had been round-eyed, silent and stolid, as usual. Mrs. Marlow had violently reproached him for tearing up the child's paintings and thrown all the responsibility of Regina's leaving home upon him, and he had finally lost his temper, and taken her by the shoulders, and put her out of his study, and she had not been at luncheon either. That was all.

By dinner all would assemble again, with only the usual feelings of aggravation, dislike and hostility to one another.

And now he could certainly get Everest to restore the church for him. It needed it badly, and enlarging too. He could not well refuse under the circumstances, and after the marriage Lanark Park would be a nice place for the girls to stay at. What an excuse for him too; for frequent visits to town . . . to see Regina! . . . She was very generous

also. Now she would be so rich, there were many little loans he could ask of her — a motor would certainly be a convenience, for the more distant visits to his parishioners, and ready cash . . . for other expenses that it was troublesome to draw cheques for. . . . Yes, decidedly the news was good, though it might have been better; so he dipped his pen in the ink and answered Everest's note at once:

“ **MY DEAR EVEREST**,— Perhaps you can imagine with what profound sorrow I read your letter of yesterday. I am doubly wounded, as father and as clergyman.

“ It is indeed deplorable that a girl like Regina, brought up so carefully, spiritually watched over so tenderly, grounded so thoroughly in religious principles and surrounded by the purity of a loving home, should have taken such a terrible and distressing step.

“ You ask me to have confidence in you, and I think you know already, my dear Everest, I have the greatest confidence. But for this, the blow would be insupportable. You must, however, realise what a father's feelings are in such a terrible situation, and I trust you will exert yourself to the utmost to make my daughter's position an honourable one as soon as you possibly can. I cannot write more at present; I feel it all too keenly. In much sorrow, your old friend,

“ **JOHN.**”

He read that over with satisfaction. He knew Everest would not stand the least coercion, but that to say he had confidence in him and, as it were, to

put him on his honour, was the best — in fact the only — way to deal with him.

With a bland smile, he folded the letter, put it in its envelope and then turned to his sermon for next Sunday, on “Candour and Honesty.”

When Everest received this letter he read it through, an amused smile playing over his handsome face, and then slipped it into his pocket, with the single comment: “Jolly old humbug, John!”

The first thing on Monday morning Regina begged him to see about getting her picture sold, and Everest sent it to a shop he knew well in Bond Street, with instructions to frame and glaze it, and expose it in the window.

Regina asked specially that the price might be put on, and fixed it without consulting anyone at seventy-five pounds.

Two or three days after, in Bond Street, they saw a little knot of people before a shop, and when they came up to it found it was “The Murderer” that made the attraction.

The painting looked very fine in its frame, and leaning back at just the right angle in the window. One could hardly pass it without at least a sideways glance, and nearly everyone paused to gaze at it.

Regina stood for a moment, hearing, with Everest beside her, the comments on her work. Outwardly, she was quite unmoved, but when they turned into the park she looked up at him.

Her face was flushed and glowing, her eyes shone softly. “Thank you so much for arranging it all so well for me. I shall be glad when it is sold. It

is not a picture one wants to keep, as one does 'The Enchanted Garden,' and then after a pause: "All those people to-day spoke of its great power, didn't they? It was fun to hear them talk!"

The following days were largely occupied in getting clothes, and though Regina begged him not to trouble about these, he came with her and superintended all the purchases.

She did not seem to wish to have anything sent her from the Rectory, and she never inquired what Everest had written to her father, nor what the reply had been. For her, apparently, her home and all its inmates had ceased to exist.

These days spent in town, empty though it was, and rather dusty and disagreeable at that time of year, were full of a wonderful delight for them both. Everest was gifted with a marvellously good temper, the result of his perfect health and strength. Nothing ever seemed to ruffle or disturb him. He was always ready to laugh at those thousand little contretemps that occur in life from day to day — he never blamed her for them, even when she deserved it. He was always satisfied with the clothes she chose and wore; according to him, she was always dressed in the right things, and looked sweet in them. He sympathised with her in her smallest troubles. If she had an ache, or pain, or a cut finger it was a serious matter to him; and in these days of intimate companionship with him Regina grew to know what the absolute idolatry of another meant. She had come to him with it in her heart, as so many women come to their lovers and husbands with that precious gift, but in nearly every case the intense egoism, the want

of all consideration, the ungracious ill-humour, the constant anger over petty details that men usually display in daily life, completely destroy it, leaving the woman at last weary and indifferent. Everest's gay, sunny disposition was very like Regina's own, and to be with him, after living in the depressing atmosphere of the Rectory, made her feel as a bird might feel set free in a glad, green wood, full of summer light, after long imprisonment in a cellar. Almost breaking with its own delight, her heart soared upwards in love's bright and sunny sky.

The picture had been in the window of the Bond Street shop a few days when late one afternoon a middle-aged man entered, and nodding to the proprietor took a chair by the counter.

"I see you've found a new genius, Jim," he said, "and you are doing your best to boom it, by putting on that ridiculous price; but you know it's too much; you won't get it!"

"Well, sir, it's the lady's own price. I am selling it for her," answered the man deferentially, for his visitor was a constant customer; a good judge of painting, and with a purse as sound as his judgment.

"Oh, it's a lady, is it? So much the better. A pretty one?"

"I shouldn't like to say so very pretty, but tall and attractive, and so bright it's just like sunshine to see her come in."

"And how old?"

"Oh, about eighteen or nineteen I should say."

His customer nodded contentedly.

"She has remarkable talent — remarkable! The

choice of subject alone shows that; so strong, so original. All the same, I can't give you that sum for it. It's ridiculous. You just take off two-fifty, and then we can talk about it."

The shopman's face was a study, as he looked back at his interlocutor. He had known Mr. Burton for twenty-five years, and had never seen him intoxicated yet, but what was he talking about now?

"Two-fifty?" he repeated blankly.

"Yes!" returned the other testily, thinking he was pondering discontentedly over the demanded reduction, "I say two-fifty. You must know, as well as I do, that five hundred is a fancy price for a water-colour. However I'll stand that; it's a big picture, and something quite exceptional, so I'll go five hundred, especially as the lady is eighteen and attractive. But not any more, and if you refuse that, you're a fool, Jim!"

Jim looked down at his glass counter, struggling with his amazement, and it did credit to his good qualities as a trader that his face presented nothing more than the surly and sour look of one who is asked to reduce his price for a valuable object. Rapidly, he tried to grasp the position, and, though he could not find at once the key to it, he saw that there was some error somewhere, which had induced Burton to make him an offer of five hundred pounds for a picture priced at seventy-five. It was clearly his duty to get for the artist the most that anyone was willing to pay for the painting. It was even more his duty to secure the largest possible commission for himself.

Here, if anywhere, the law of *caveat emptor* must

apply. Burton had seen the picture, Burton was a connoisseur, if Burton said it was worth five hundred that settled it; it was worth it. The vocation of picture-dealing lends a mask to the face and adroitness to the mind.

Jim looked up with a depressed air.

“The lady fixed the price herself, sir. . . . I don’t know whether I ought to. . . .”

Burton interrupted him: “Fiddlesticks! Fiddlesticks! I’ll write you a cheque for five hundred pounds, and you send it to the lady with my compliments, not only on her painting, but on her cheek in asking so much for it. Say if she’s not satisfied, she can return the cheque and have her picture back.” And he drew out a cheque-book and laid it on the counter. Jim, inwardly trembling lest at any moment Regina or Everest should come in and in some way spoil this amazing bargain, still moved slowly to fetch pen and ink, and put it before his customer with the grudging air of a man who hates the concession he is making.

As soon as Burton was engrossed in writing he turned to the window, and himself lifted the picture from it. The price ticket he rapidly transferred to his pocket, before Burton looked round. He had signed the cheque and pushed it over to Jim’s side of the counter. He stretched out his hand and took the painting.

“Turn on the light. . . . Let’s see how it looks by electric.”

The light was flashed on, and the beautiful soft crimson tones of the sky, the fallen brilliance on the snow, lost nothing by it.

Strong, masterly, complete, it satisfied the eye of the judge, as he scanned it rapidly and keenly.

“She’ll go far, very far, if some damned love business doesn’t cripple her,” he muttered to himself, and then aloud to Jim:

“Tell her to paint me a pendant to this — anything she likes, and I’ll give her another five hundred pounds, but not more, mind! Gad, I do like her cheek!”

“Shall I send this, sir?” asked Jim: he felt himself turning green with fear lest anything should happen before he could get Burton and the picture safely off his premises, the cheque left behind.

“No, no! Put it in the motor, I’ll take it with me. You can send me up the lady herself, if you like! With the pendant, you know!” And chuckling at his own joke he went out to his waiting motor, followed by Jim, grasping the picture with hands that were damp and cold with anxiety. The motor started, and he went back to his shop.

“Well, talk of luck! ! !”

He drew the ticket from his pocket and looked at it under the electric burner; a hair had curled itself round on the paper, by the figures, and formed a little blot after them, which looked something like a closed nought. The ticket, if your eye happened to catch it that way, read £750, and nothing else.

Just as Everest was going to change his clothes for dinner, that evening, the telephone in the studio called him up. He went to it and heard the picture-dealer’s voice:

“Would you mind stepping round, sir, for a moment? It’s about the picture, and it’s important:

only please don't say anything to the lady till you've seen me, please, sir."

Everest assented and went back to Regina. She was seated, ready to go out to the restaurant where they usually dined, dressed in a white dress he had chosen for her, very similar to the one she had worn at the Rectory the first night he saw her.

"I like to see you in one like that — it brings such happy associations with it," he had said.

A collar of sapphires he had given her was round her neck, and the jewelled star he had sent to Stossop at her breast.

She looked very lovely, as she always did in evening dress, the wonderful milky whiteness of her skin and its satin surface seemed to hold the eye irresistibly.

Beside her lay her dark cloak, white-lined, ready to slip on. "I am so sorry, but I must go out for a few minutes. Will you amuse yourself till I come back?"

She looked up and saw Everest with his hat and coat on.

"Certainly, don't hurry on my account," she said, smiling up at him, and he went out.

At the shop he found Jim in a state of dismay. Possible complications had occurred to him. He explained the whole incident to Everest and then wound up with:

"I didn't know what to say on the spur of the moment, as you might call it. With the gentleman there, pressing me to take five hundred pounds for it, it seemed nothing less than my duty, but for heaven's sake, sir, don't let the lady give me away about it, for if Mr. Burton thought I'd made him pay more

than I might have done, perhaps he'd never come into the shop again."

Everest listened to the whole recital with some amusement.

"I can't say what view the lady will take," he said at the end. "But I am quite sure she won't do anything to make trouble for you. As you say, Burton's opinion goes far to making the value of it. I do not see any harm in her accepting his price myself, but she may choose to refuse. We shall see."

"If she lets on that she fixed the price at seventy-five pounds, Burton'll see the whole game," wailed the shopman. "Do tell her, sir, she mustn't give me away like that."

Everest promised he would see he was protected, and when the man was somewhat calmed, he returned to the rooms.

Regina was standing by the mantelpiece, gazing at the garden picture, when he entered.

He went up to her, and bending over her kissed her white shoulder, and pressed the cheque into her hand.

"The picture was sold to-day and the buyer thought its price was seven hundred and fifty pounds. He offered Jim five hundred for it, and the man thought it his duty to accept it."

Regina gazed back at him with astonished eyes.

"Then is this for me?" she asked, unfolding the cheque.

"Yes; Burton, the man who bought it, was satisfied to give that for it, which should be a great satisfaction to you."

"It is; but why did he think it was priced at seven hundred and fifty? I suppose he misread the card.

I think I had better write and tell him I only asked seventy-five pounds."

If John Marlow was a humbug, Regina certainly was not. Everest watched her with interest. He knew so well what John would have said and done in a like case. He would have been so bland and glib, and pocketed the cheque so smoothly!

"You can't very well without giving away the shopman, who not unnaturally thought he was doing his best for you. It has made rather a difficult situation. You had better think over what you'd like to do while I'm dressing."

Regina took the cheque and walked back into the sitting-room. She sat down at once and wrote:

"DEAR SIR,— Through a mistake of mine, you were asked for my picture more than I intended. I am therefore returning you your cheque for five hundred pounds and I shall be quite satisfied if you will send me another for one hundred pounds instead. Yours faithfully,

"REGINA ——."

And here she paused. It was the first note she had written since she had been with Everest. What would he wish her to sign it? She left it open, and sat and waited till he came in.

Everest picked up the note and read it; then he saw the blank she had left, and took the pen from her and wrote in, himself: "Lanark," and she pressed her soft, warm lips on his hand as it laid down the pen.

"Can that do any harm to the dealer?" she asked. "It has all got into a muddle, and I hate even that

note, because it's not absolutely straight facts, but perhaps it's the best I can do. What do you think?"

"I think it's all right, if you want to return the cheque, which there's no real need to do, since Burton bought the thing with his eyes open."

"I know, but there is a feeling he was somehow deceived. I would rather return it, I think. I only want the seventy-five pounds I asked really, but I don't dare to bring that in, because it would betray the dealer. It would strike Burton probably, then, that the man acted as he did."

She put the note in an envelope and addressed it at Everest's dictation, and on their way to the restaurant they posted it. Everest meditated in silence on her action. It was just what he had expected of her. He saw that of the business, worldly, trader's instinct, which was so marked a feature of the Rector's character, there was not a trace in Regina. She had the aristocrat's outlook on things, similar to his own, and he admired the quick, decided way she had instantly refused to be even the passive party to a mild deceit, by which she was to profit considerably. That Burton had considered her picture worth five hundred pounds, and valued it at that, pleased him also greatly, and in his ears rang the words of the connoisseur, repeated by the dealer:

"She will go very far, if some confounded love business doesn't cripple her."

And suddenly, besieged by many thoughts, he turned to her, as she sat beside him in the taxi, and kissed her impetuously, and crushed her up to him, taking the girl by surprise. But she was always ready for his caresses, and put her arm up round his

neck, and kissed him back, although it was ruffling her hair, and crushing to death the tea-roses she had pinned at her breast.

The next day, while they were having tea together in the studio, where he had been showing her his work, she received Burton's answer, enclosing the original cheque:

“**MY DEAR YOUNG LADY**,—Pardon this form of address. I am sure you must be very young to be so honest. I paid five hundred pounds for your picture, and it's more than worth it. I had an advance offer on it to-day.

“Go to work, and paint me another as soon as you can. Any subject, and the price to be five hundred pounds. Your admirer,

“**CHARLES BURTON.**”

“*I am so glad, Everest!*” she exclaimed, the brilliant light he knew so well leaping up in her eyes. “A thousand pounds! I need not spend more than that in a year, and so be no expense whatever to you.”

Everest laughed.

“My sweet, no; but if you cost me twenty thousand a year, I would be delighted to pay it!”

CHAPTER VI

PARADISE OR . . . ?

ABOUT a week later the flat was ready for them, and, their things having preceded them, they drove over to it in the afternoon.

Tears had stood in Regina's eyes as she took her possessions out of Everest's room at the studio to pack them.

"I have been so wonderfully happy here," she exclaimed, "I cannot help being sorry to leave. This is where I came and took you by surprise, and you were so good to me."

"Well, my darling, we might go on staying here, only, you see, it is not very comfortable being obliged to go out to all our meals. I generally only use this place in the summer, and when I am up just for a few days or when I have a picture on hand," Everest had answered, coming up to her.

"We shall soon furnish the flat with as much joy and happiness as we have had here."

Regina laughed and sighed.

"The best furniture of all — joy and happiness," she repeated, and went on steadily packing.

They had lived quite in Bohemian style at the studio, having no servants to wait upon them, only the *concierge* of the whole building and his underlings, who saw to the cleaning of the place and the arrang-

ing of the rooms, the carrying up of letters and water, wood or coal, as required. Everest had made their own coffee in the morning, and tea in the afternoon. For all else, they had relied on the restaurants outside. There had been a charm in the quietness, the simplicity of it all, in the utter absence of other eyes upon them, even of servants, in the sense of being absolutely alone together in this little niche of London, and to the girl a great, an indefinable charm, in knowing this was his own, his most private, particular niche, where he had lived and worked alone.

When they reached the flat, and Everest took her over it, Regina was surprised at its wonderful comfort and luxury. The rooms at the studio, where they had been staying, were large, well furnished and in perfect order, but there had been a certain simplicity about them, a suggestion that they were used by a bachelor in his hours of severe and solitary work. The whole appearance and air of the flat was totally different. It was full of beauty and luxury, and spoke of pleasure and ease, and the delight of the senses. Everest had been preparing it for her, and his heart had been in all the designing of it, while, as he did not care in the least what the bills came to, everything in it was of the most beautiful and most costly, extravagant type.

It was spacious, with a wide, high hall, square in shape, from which the various rooms opened, and contained two large bedrooms, dining and drawing rooms and an extra sitting-room, besides all the offices, servants' bedrooms, kitchen and bathrooms. Regina thought the bedroom he had arranged for

them the most beautiful specimen of furnishing she had ever seen. It was all in white and silver, with a silver chick — that is to say, long curtains composed of vertical, swinging threads of silver beads — enclosing the entire bed.

The walls were hung with white satin embroidered with silver, instead of being papered, and the curtains were white satin and velvet, lined with silver. The carpet was white velvet pile, with a design of lilies of the valley, and their pale green leaves wreathed over it, and outlined in silver, and all the furniture and china in the room bore out the same design. The whole was lighted by deep rose-coloured lamps, enclosed in fairy-like silver open-work, the tinted light flooding everything, which otherwise might have seemed too cold, with tender warmth.

“How exquisite! How truly lovely!” she exclaimed to him, and he flushed and laughed, and said nothing was good enough for her, and that he had designed the room to imitate the diamond-like radiance of her mind, and the satin whiteness of her skin.

They went on from room to room, Regina admiring everything, her eyes delighting in all the beauty and perfection of it, and her heart beating uncertainly to think of the homage it all expressed for her.

They came back finally to the drawing-room, where a little fire burned cheerily, though it was not at all cold, and the window was open. Tea was laid ready for them, on a table near the fire, and they sat down, opposite each other, looking into each other’s eyes, and feeling that no two human beings could possibly be more happy than they were.

Everest had thought four servants would be enough for them: a cook, housemaid, footman, and his own valet. He had offered Regina a maid, but she had begged to be allowed to continue without one.

"I do everything so simply and quickly for myself. I am accustomed to it, and I don't want to become less independent."

Everest had replied it didn't matter at all, and so the question was left.

The valet, Hammond, had greeted Regina respectfully, inwardly delighted that his master had chosen her, and not one of "them other 'aughty and stupid young ladies at the Rectory."

"You must be quite tired with all that tour of inspection," Everest said, as they drew up their chairs to the table, "have some of these hot scones to restore you."

"I shall soon be restored from such a pleasant fatigue as that," she returned, laughing. "The rooms are so beautiful, they are just like lovely pictures, and you have had so many of your own things brought here they look as if we had been living in them for months already."

He had brought many personal things there, and a few of his own pictures, which pleased her more than anything. They were finely finished paintings of tropical scenery, and she spent a long time studying them. Her own picture of "The Enchanted Garden" he could not bear to part with from his bedroom, and it stood by itself on a table, at the foot of the white and silver bed.

A few days after their installation, Everest had

to leave her, to go into the country, and after a morning's work on her new picture she spent the afternoon playing the piano.

About four o'clock she rang for tea, and just after it had been brought heard the hall door open and footsteps and voices outside.

She opened the drawing-room door and saw that the footman was interviewing a tiny and extremely dainty feminine young person, dressed in black velvet and a small toque covered with Parma violets.

She had a sheaf of papers in her hands, some keys and a gold pencil, and a velvet bag swung from her grey gloved wrist. A sudden tremor of interest, though she could not tell why, and could only see the back of the intruder, ran through Regina.

“But I must have left it here, because I have already looked on the stairs and everywhere,” she heard the girl saying.

“I am sorry, madam, but nothing has been noticed here,” the footman was replying, when his mistress stepped forward.

The visitor turned, and Regina saw she was face to face with the beautiful, cameo-like countenance she had seen in the velvet case in Everest's room at Stossop. She recognised it instantly—in fact it was such a striking face, and of such a marked type, it would have been quite impossible not to do so. For the first instant Regina thought that the girl had come to see her. Then she remembered that, though she, Regina, knew her by her portrait and through Everest's remarks, the girl had never seen and probably never heard of herself, and was in ignorance equally of Everest's being at this address.

It was just a strange chance that had brought them together.

"I have lost my pocket-book, with all my notes in it — so tiresome!" the girl was saying, as she turned to Regina.

"I called to see the flat above, and mistook the number. I came in here before I discovered my mistake, and so I thought I might have dropped my book here, as I can't find it anywhere else. I am tired to death with looking at flats and worrying over them and now, in addition, to lose my pocket-book. . . ."

She looked very tired, her face was flushed, she seemed nervous and half-inclined to cry.

A thought came to Regina that she would like to see more of her. She was truly beautiful, and she was Everest's cousin.

"I am so sorry," she said aloud, "but won't you come in and rest for a few moments, and have tea with me? I am quite alone, and just going to have mine."

The girl hesitated. Behind Regina she could see the luxurious and inviting room, with its tea-table, burdened with good things. She was dreadfully tired and thirsty . . . her motor was downstairs at the door, and could easily wait . . . tea would be delightful and she could spin home afterwards in no time.

"Oh, thanks. . . . Well, do you know, I think I will really. . . . It is too kind of you. . . ."

"I shall be delighted," returned Regina. And the footman closed the door, while the two women passed into the drawing-room.

She gave her guest a low easy-chair by the fire, facing the window, and the talk was all about the lost pocket-book for many minutes, and while Regina listened and sympathised she studied intently the face opposite her. The girl was very fair, light curls of absolute and natural gold showed under her tiny hat, her eyes were large and blue, and surmounted by pale brown eyebrows, most perfectly and delicately arched. The features were exquisite in their refinement, in their delicacy and finish of form. A tiny, straight nose, a little curled upper lip, a most exactly and elaborately curved mouth of scarlet, a ring of small, even teeth, a perfect chin, set on a round column of throat, made up a face of great beauty. The skin was of the colour and appearance of ivory, and, now that the flush was dying away, colourless, except for its even tone of cream. She was exceedingly small, there seemed hardly any body at all in the tight-fitting black velvet gown.

In the large, voluptuous easy-chair she looked like a beautiful little French doll. She explained how her aunt and herself were looking at flats for some friends, and how to-day her aunt had been ill and unable to come, and had begged her to motor to some different addresses, and how she had done so, and made a lot of notes as to prices and conditions — that this was the last to be visited, and that having done that, and coming downstairs, she had missed her book, which contained the whole fruits of her labours, and she was ready to cry with vexation over it, etc., etc.

She talked prettily enough, but Regina saw, long

before the recital, with its many repetitions, its unnecessary details, its confused arrangement, was over, the kind of mental equipment she possessed. The losing of the pocket-book was exactly what might have been expected of the silly, feather-headed little-creature.

After the pocket-book's loss had been thoroughly deplored, Regina led her into general conversation. She thought possibly, as her visitor's eyes strayed about, they might recognise some of Everest's things, but she did not seem to do so, nor to know the pictures, on which, at Regina's invitation, she expressed some very banal opinions. She seemed to admire the furniture of the flat a good deal more.

Regina, who, like all great natures, had practically the double disposition of male and female in her, was always greatly attracted, as a man is, by beauty and grace in a woman.

She felt no hostility to it, and no jealousy, so that Everest's cousin had appealed to her favourably at first. At the end, however, of half-an-hour the girl had tired and bored her by the inanity of everything she said, and she found herself wondering whether, if the girl married, the husband would shortly after commit suicide or enter a lunatic asylum, or what would be his fate, and she was glad when the visitor said she must go.

“It's been too awfully sweet of you!” she said. “I've enjoyed the rest so much, and feel quite well again. . . . Good-bye. . . .”

Regina wished her good-bye and accompanied her to the hall. True to English traditions of good

breeding, they had conversed all the time without asking each other a single question, or hearing each other's names.

When her visitor had gone, Regina walked over to the fire and gazed long at her own face in the mirror.

Though it had not the beauty of line of the other girl's, it possessed something that hers had not.

Then she commenced walking up and down the room. She was asking herself this question:

"That girl, with all her possessions and her beauty, could she make a man as happy as I can, I wonder?"

The thing interested her, and she pondered over it deeply and nearly made herself late in dressing for dinner.

When Everest came back she recounted the whole incident, just as it had happened, and saw him contract his eyebrows.

"So Sybil's in town now," he remarked merely, and seemed disinclined to pursue the subject.

For many days after this, Everest was very much occupied, and out a great deal, and Regina devoted herself to the painting for Burton.

They would be leaving England shortly for the winter, and she was anxious to complete her work in good time before they had to start. She had called her subject "The Great Denial," and she hoped to make it as strong a picture as "The Murderer."

It was the interior of a monastic cell, of which the cold grey stone was illumined by a feeble candle flame. On the stone ledge, that served as table, stood a plate of untouched bread, by a flagon of

water, equally untasted. On the floor, stretched out, with his arms extended in the form of a cross, lay the poor, attenuated, emaciated figure of a young monk, apparently asleep.

Upon his face rested an expression of extreme beatitude. The whole end of the cell was in vivid light, a sort of rose colour deepening into crimson and shot through with gold, and from the centre of the rosy mist lifted itself the etherealised form of a woman. In her face shone all the purest and tenderest qualities of sexual love, as she seemed to smile on the poor, thin figure on the flagstones.

Regina worked on this picture slowly, lovingly, with tender care, different entirely from the fierce rush of inspiration, the fury of energy in which she had accomplished the other. She painted chiefly while Everest was out, and this was often, for he had a good deal to do and attend to before leaving England for an indefinite time.

As no marriage had been given out, he could not introduce Regina to any of his friends. He disliked equally the idea of lying directly about her position, and of running the risk of her being annoyed or insulted by them. So he saw little of his friends, and refused all the invitations he could. Where he was obliged to accept, he went alone, and Regina was quite happy, for she wanted nothing but Everest himself; friends, amusement, gaiety, display — all these were nothing to her. Her love and her art filled to overcrowding her daily life.

But sheltered though she lived in this happy seclusion, certain rumours of the enormity of Everest's conduct reached the attentive ears of his family, and

to her surprise, one afternoon, she received a visit from Everest's sister. She was sitting alone in the large drawing-room of the flat, half buried in one of the luxurious arm-chairs, contemplating with dreamy satisfaction the finished picture, to which she had been adding a few final touches, softening here and there some over-dark lines. With the brush still in her hand, she sat far back in her chair, gazing on her work, while the light outside diminished and the great room grew dim, lighted only by the wavering glow from the fire. She would not ring for the tea to be brought up till Everest came back, nor turn on the light ; she would wait for him, and from gazing on the picture she gradually fell to musing in the shadow-filled room and meditating on her life. How supremely happy she was in it ! She could not imagine at that moment one other gift that she would demand from the gods, if she had had the privilege of doing so. How perfect the union between herself and her lover was ! She wondered if it were usual, this harmony of wish and desire, of thought and expression, of outlook and view between two people, if it were usual for women to feel that adoration for the lover or husband they chose that she felt for Everest, so that his mere entering the room gave her joy, his smile upon her a passionate delight, the sound of his voice an excited pleasure, while his desire for herself carried her away to a paradise of which afterwards her brain could hardly realise or reconstruct in memory the ecstasy. As she was dreaming in these soft reveries the door suddenly opened, and, thinking it was Everest himself, she sprang up to welcome him.

It was the footman, however, who handed her a

salver, from which she took and read the little white slip :

“ Miss Lanark.”

“ Say I am at home,” she said, and turned on the light, filling the room with soft rose colour from its many-shaded lamps. After a moment Miss Lanark entered. The luxury of the beautifully furnished room struck upon her senses disagreeably, the warmth, the light, the extreme comfort of it, the beauty of its velvet hangings and carpet, its silken curtains, the fragrance of the exotic flowers on the tables impressed her just as she expected to be impressed, coming to her brother’s rooms from the severe simplicity of her own Scottish home. Here was comfort, luxury, beauty; all the accompaniments of *vice*. She glanced towards her hostess, standing to receive her. Here too, just as she expected: the girl was richly dressed; a gown of pastel-blue velvet fitted close—so closely and smoothly Miss Lanark had never seen, except on the stage, in her rare visits to the theatre—the beautiful, supple figure of the wearer, and fell in gracious folds round her. There seemed old lace and some pearls about her throat, and above rose her face, so soft and warm and vivid in its fair colouring that it suggested being painted. Yes, it was all there just as she had imagined. The picture was complete. Beauty, ease, luxury, happiness, these must and did mean—sin.

She took the chair the girl drew forward for her. She was very calm and self-possessed, and Regina thrilled through all her being, recognising in her just that same wonderful grace of bearing, that air of perfect breeding, that charmed her so in Everest. She

was about ten years older than he was, and her hair was grey, while his was quite black, but she had the same beautiful features, only whereas in Everest's case the face was all light and fire, life and animation, the sister's was dead and grey and cold, unsmiling and severe.

"I have come to talk to you about my brother," she said, without any preface, and Regina heard the gentle, refined tones of Everest's voice, only with the music left out.

"I am so glad," she rejoined simply. "There is no subject so dear to me. I worship him."

This last phrase offended Miss Lanark; men and women, in her estimation, should like and esteem each other. They should not use the word "worship" about each other, but keep that for their Maker. She passed this over in silence on this occasion, and pursued coldly:

"Then don't you see how wrong it is to be living with him like this, and keeping him from doing his duty to himself and his family?"

"What is Everest's duty?" queried Regina, gazing at her visitor with genuine interest.

For the moment Miss Lanark was disconcerted. She had not really thought of that. The ordinary run of people make use of a number of set phrases, that have been composed for them and passed on by others, and the direct questions of the few who think for themselves generally bring confusion and discomfort upon them.

"Well . . . er . . . to . . . er . . . marry some proper and fitting person, and have children to inherit his name and estates."

“Wouldn’t it be just as good for the family, and everybody, if his brother inherited them?”

Again Miss Lanark felt a little uncertain of her ground.

“No,” she said, with some asperity, after a minute; “I don’t think it would.”

“But Everest was not doing all that when he met me,” objected Regina. “He spent his time travelling about over the world, and loving and being loved by all sorts of people.”

Miss Lanark drew herself together very rigidly on her chair, the lines of her mouth set.

“I am quite aware that Everest has been very wild,” she said icily, “but we all hoped he would come home and settle down now to a quiet and godly life.”

Regina was silent for a few moments. Her gaze swept round the peaceful, restful room, where the walls had never echoed a hard or unloving word all the time that she and Everest had occupied it, which had enclosed a shrine of perfect love, where both had vied with each other in self-sacrifice, in tenderness, in devotion, and wondered if indeed any life could be more godly than theirs.

“We all hoped he would marry his cousin, Lady Constance Sybil Graham, on his return to this country, and he would have done, I believe, but for you. He would now, if — if —” She hesitated.

“You think it would be a good beginning for the godly life, to desert me, when I love him and he loves me, in order to marry someone who has a better worldly position, is that it?” Regina asked, leaning forward. Her eyes were full of mirth.

Miss Lanark felt horribly embarrassed. It is so

difficult to keep up the religious and the worldly line of argument side by side. She hesitated and then said coldly:

“A sister has to consider her brother’s worldly interests as well as the welfare of his soul, and if you would listen to your better nature, and set him free by going away from him, both would benefit, I feel sure.”

This was a little ambiguous, but Regina understood the “both” to refer to Everest’s soul and his worldly interests. She looked away to the fire in silence; to her open, courageous nature, to her singleness of mind, it seemed truly marvellous this straining after the cloak of religion, this dragging of the mantle of piety round the grinning skeleton of lust after riches and worldly good.

Miss Lanark brought with her into this room, where Everest and she had led such a frank, sincere and natural existence, just the same atmosphere of falsity, of pretence, of humbug, that had pervaded the Rectory. She could well understand how Everest had hated his home as she had hated hers, and with this thought came the sweet recollection of a phrase of his, uttered in one of their close embraces:

“I have never known happiness till now.”

“Everest is perfectly free to leave me if he likes,” she answered, after a minute. “I should never stand in the way of his marrying or doing anything he wishes, but while he is perfectly happy I am not going to leave him and cause him distress and pain, nor am I going to try to force him into a marriage with a commonplace woman, who I don’t believe could satisfy him.”

"Commonplace woman! A girl of that splendid family, with all that money and a title!"

"None of those things prevent her being commonplace," returned *Regina* calmly.

"You've never seen her, you don't know anything about her."

"Yes; she came here one day for a few minutes, about some business."

"You could not tell in that time what she was like."

"I saw her and talked to her. I should be very stupid if I could not tell then what sort of person she was."

Miss Lanark rocked herself backwards and forwards in her chair in silence.

"To think of my brother," she moaned, after a pause, "with all his wealth, his attainments, his opportunities, doing nothing with them — living in sin, like this!"

Regina leant back in her chair.

"Everest is rather anxious to marry me," she remarked. "Would you like that better, if he did?"

Miss Lanark started and sat bolt upright:

"*You!* *Marry you!* A country rector's daughter, and an *artist!*" Had she said "criminal" the accent could not have been more marked. "And *Everest!* He could have anybody! There is not one girl in town who would refuse him . . . and then, to marry you!"

"Still, he would not be living in sin, would he?" returned *Regina*, nibbling the end of her paint-brush and looking across the red firelight at her visitor, with a laugh in her great, lustrous eyes.

Miss Lanark covered her face with her thin, beautifully gloved hands.

“Oh, it is all horrible!—whether he marries you or lives with you. . . . Cannot you go away and leave him to marry someone suitable, as he would have done, but for you?”

“You think for him to marry a woman he disliked, and perhaps hated, would be better than to live with one he loves, without marriage?”

“Oh *yes!*” replied Miss Lanark, so fervently that Regina sat silent, thinking how truly “the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life,” marvelling at the distance away from the truth of their religion the modern Christian has got.

“Well, you see, I don’t. I consider hate is a wrong and wicked thing in itself, essentially evil; and I think wedded hate is a great deal worse than unwedded love, so that I am afraid I cannot meet you in any way, except by accepting Everest’s proposal that we should marry each other, but so far, for his sake, I have thought it better for him to be quite free.”

Miss Lanark wiped her eyes and coughed, then she said hesitatingly:

“Of course, if you would go, Everest is in a position to give you a very good allowance indeed.” She stopped weakly, her throat seemed to dry at the words.

Regina simply laughed, quietly, musically. Miss Lanark recognised what a charm such a laugh would have for a man.

“I don’t think I am in need of an allowance from Everest, or anybody else,” she answered, glancing at

the great picture, on which the red light of the fire glowed softly, as if it would caress it.

Just at that moment the door opened and Everest came in. Regina sprang up and ran to meet him, as she was accustomed to do. They embraced and kissed, quite oblivious of their visitor, whom Regina had, for the moment, utterly forgotten, and Everest had not even seen, submerged as she was in the depths of a velvet chair, with its back to the door.

Regina remembered her after a minute.

"Your sister is here," she whispered in his ear, as they came together towards the fire.

During their embrace by the door, Miss Lanark, who had never been kissed by a man in her life, and who secretly felt great curiosity as to what the dreadful sensation would be like, was sitting rigidly with locked hands in her lap, gazing straight before her into the fire when they approached. She was telling herself, inwardly, she hated people making exhibitions of their feelings before others, but it was all like the rest; just what she had expected: extravagance everywhere, and no restraint of any kind.

"How are you, Clara?" asked Everest, in not too pleased a tone. "I didn't know you were in town."

"No," returned Miss Lanark coldly. "I came yesterday on purpose to see if various reports I had heard at home were true, and to call upon," she hesitated, and then added, "this lady."

Everest did not take up her speech in any way.

"How did you get this address?" he said merely, taking the silk scarf from his neck. Regina, watching his face, saw it grow dark with annoyance.

"I went to the studio, and they gave it me there," his sister rejoined, rising.

"You will stay and have some tea with us surely, now Everest has come in," Regina said, with her hand on the bell, but Miss Lanark declined stiffly.

She felt she must get away from this distasteful place. The whole atmosphere seemed to her hot with emotion, loving emotion, and loving emotion meant wickedness. Had Miss Lanark wished to make a representation of hell, she would certainly have drawn all the damned souls kissing each other. To have depicted them murdering or robbing, toasting or frying or torturing each other, would have seemed to be delineating too trivial and insignificant offences, but if they were represented as kissing! That would immediately explain why they were there, and how fully they deserved it.

She held out her hand to Regina.

"I sincerely hope you will think over what I have said. We all of us have to make sacrifices to duty."

"Certainly," returned Regina. "One's duty towards others should be the first thought in one's life."

Her tone was calm, grave and beautiful; she voiced exactly what was indeed the rule of her being.

Miss Lanark felt as if someone had thrown cold water in her face. She turned to the door in silence.

"I suppose I shall see you before you go abroad this winter, Everest?" she added to her brother.

"Oh, no doubt — we sha'n't start till September," he rejoined, going to the door to hold it open for her.

Miss Lanark's thin cheek flushed at the word "we."

So this beautiful, warm-looking, kissing woman was going to be taken out with him! She lifted her eyes at the door, and hers and her brother's met.

His brows were quite calm, his forehead smooth, but his gaze met hers with an iron determination in it.

“ You had better not interfere with my affairs,” was what it plainly said, and she went out, cold with anger and indignation.

Everest came quickly over to the hearth.

“ What has that tiresome woman been saying? ” he asked.

Regina had resumed her seat, and was gazing into the fire.

“ Nothing, dearest, very particular. Only what I know already; that in a worldly sense I am not good enough for you. . . . And she also seemed to think if you married a rich woman it would be good for your soul, as well as your prospects, though I can't follow her reasoning myself! ”

“ Damned lot of hypocrites, all my people are! ” remarked Everest in answer; and then he thought of John Marlow and his letter of “ profound sorrow. ” “ I suppose they are all like that, don't let's bother about them! Give me some tea. ”

The tea had been brought in, and Regina poured it out for him with loving care over every detail. He took it from her, and they sat in silence for a few minutes, rejoicing in being together again after some hours' separation.

Then Everest leant forward and said very earnestly:

“ I think, my darling, you had better marry me

now, before we start on the Egyptian tour. I want to take you up the Nile this winter, and show you the Soudan. I was arranging about it to-day, my own dahabeeyah is there, and I have given orders it's all to be refitted for you, by September. . . . Then, later, we'll go into camp together, and do a little lion-hunting, if you like. . . . But, you see, it's all rather risky work, and I would like to know that we were married, and it was all straight and square, so that if there were any accident to me you would be in a good position."

"If there were any accident to you, nothing would matter any more at all," returned Regina, in a low tone; and Everest came over and knelt by her low chair, putting both arms round the supple waist, that felt so warm and soft in its smooth velvet casing.

"Dear little girl, you are much too good to me. Nobody has ever loved me as you do. I bought a rifle and a pistol for you to-day, and I am having a gold plate with 'My Darling' engraved on it, put on both, because you said you loved to hear me say that."

"But, if we do go to the Soudan, you won't ask me to kill anything, will you?" she asked, a look of startled apprehension in her eyes. "As far as I am concerned, the animals are all my personal friends and relations. They are one family with human beings. I do not think there is any real difference. Life is uniform everywhere. Only in some forms it has greater power and capacity than in others."

"I shall not ask you to kill anything," returned Everest, smiling. "But you must learn to shoot well, both with a pistol and rifle. It's quite as nec-

essary, more necessary, for a woman than a man. And you will be a splendid shot, with your eye, that can see the deviation of a hair in your painting. That feeling for the straight line must mean good shooting. And our marriage? Come, now. . . .”

“If you continue perfectly happy with me, and other things . . . are just as we wish . . . then I will marry you at Khartoum,” replied Regina very softly, a beautiful, crimson flush passing over her face, “but not before. . . .” And then she kissed him, and let her white fingers play with his thick and glorious black hair, and Everest forgot what they were talking about, forgot everything, except that where she was was paradise, though Miss Lanark, as we know, had thought of another place in connection with her brother’s flat.

Late that same night, lying in her white and silver bed, Regina thought very seriously over things, her mind being very far from sleep. As from the first, she only had the single desire to do the best for Everest; and for many days now the question had haunted her mind: what if Nature, by some evil fate, denied her after all the power of maternity? She had heard and read that passionate, excitable natures gifted mentally, and sensitive in mind and brain, were not the best reproducers of their race. Nature cares for the type, the rule, and to exceptional beings she denies sometimes the rights she allows to those who are stolid, faithful models of the average.

Regina felt her own wish went for nothing in the matter. On the contrary, as in artistic creation, a great wish seems to war against production. She thought of all the poor royal women who, through

the ages, had asked the common gift, and been denied!

No; incredible as it seemed to her, considering all the health and strength and love they both possessed, it still might be that she would not be able to give him the one thing he had said he wished in marriage. Then, if he was married to her, bound to her, it would be impossible for him ever to realise his desire for an heir, ever to dispose of his property as he wanted to. She, herself, could not free him, except by her death, which would mean sorrow, or her desertion, which would mean disgrace — for him. She, unfruitful, useless, would be standing in the place of another woman, who possibly would have done for him what she could not.

The thought was so bitter she clenched her hands as it came to her. No, she would leave him free, until at least she was sure she had the capacity for motherhood.

Even then she might not bear a son, but that was a risk she must take, and every other woman equally with her, since conventional law makes it necessary that marriage must precede the birth of the child for it to be legitimate. That, she could not help, no means of hers could avoid that risk for him. But no other would she allow, for her own advantage. Truly and really, she kept to her duty, as she had announced it to Miss Lanark.

And wearied out at last, by much thought for the dear, unconscious one beside her she too, at last, fell asleep.

The next day the rifle and the pistol were sent home, and Everest explained to her carefully all the

properties and powers of the death-dealing objects. She listened to it all most attentively:

“ This is the best part about them, I think,” she said, when he had finished, and bent over the “ *My Darling* ” engraved upon them, and kissed it.

CHAPTER VII

WITH THE GREAT RIVER

THE Nile lay, gleaming exquisitely lilac, between its banks of golden sand, calm and smooth, with a soft sheen upon its surface, it moved forward as molten glass, without a ripple, without a murmur, in the stillness of the sunset hour. The palms on Elephantine Island held their feathery foliage without movement against the rosy violet of the glowing sky. The burnished sand, unruffled by any breeze, stretched level and even on every side, each grain of it seeming to glitter and sparkle with tawny and deep orange hues, as if some Emperor had had a carpet of jewels, of topaz and yellow amethyst unrolled along the river banks, flashing and shining under the red-gold fire of the sun rays.

Not a sound jarred upon the stillness; from the gold tips of the palms to the glow on the dreaming river all was wrapped in an infinite peace.

Some little distance from the island, motionless, with its sails hanging like curtains of gold and lilac silk in the evening light, lay the dahabeeyah of the Lanarks, and on its deck Everest and Regina were sitting side by side, in long cane chairs, watching the lustre of the western sky.

They had joined the dahabeeyah at Cairo, and, with its steam tug to pull them up, it had not taken them long to get as far as this on their way.

The boat was a thing of beauty ; all fitted in purple and silver. It was named *The Empress*, in honour of Regina, and was well worthy of its name. When the girl went through it she felt, for the first time, a rejoicing in Everest's wealth, since it gave him the power to provide such a setting for their love. As she entered the sleeping saloon, large and spacious as any room on land, and her eyes fell on the bed at one side, with its purple velvet curtains, lined with mauve satin, her feet faltered. She turned aside and, leaning her hand on the window sill, looked down into the pale green waters below.

Her relations with Everest were still too new to her, and all the emotions that filled them too intense, for her to be able to look upon the room they were to occupy together with indifference.

Beyond the sleeping saloon, which occupied the whole width of the boat, thus obtaining a very wide and gracious form, came two small dressing-rooms and bathrooms, and beyond these, a covered topped space, with open sides, a verandah, as it were, in which to sit idly, contemplating the changing view of the river sides.

It was here they were sitting now, absorbed in that wonder of light and colour that makes Egypt's peculiar beauty.

At the extreme other end lay the kitchen and the servants' quarters, next came an anteroom and hall, where one first boarded the boat. From this, one passed to the spacious dining-room, thence to the drawing-room, and so on to the sleeping saloon. Over all the fore part stretched the upper deck, with a smooth, polished floor, where, before leaving Cairo,

they had given a dance, and cool, white canvas overhead, forming the roof. Inside the whole was hung with pale mauve satin; and divans of wonderful depth and softness, inviting to slumber in the long, hot afternoons, lined the sides.

Here, in the still, moonlight evenings, with the canvas sides of the awning rolled up and their steam tug pulling them swiftly upstream against the ripple and the light, floating airs of the Nile, Everest would lie, while she played to him, or they would sit together, watching the golden sand — golden to deep orange, even in the moonlight — of the banks speed past them. It had been so far a dream of enchantment, their life on board that boat. Day by day, and night by night, this floating up and up the magical, golden river, between ever-changing vistas of loveliness, of palm grove and date plantations, of rose and azure-tinted hills, of deep green bands of the cultivated fields, of burnished stretches of glittering desert, brought to the girl's mind sometimes a sense of unreality.

“One never is so perfectly happy in one's life, for long,” she often thought. “The gods must begin to envy me soon, as the Greeks would say, and strike me down.” And she clung to every jewelled hour, as sometimes in those rare dreams of perfect happiness that visit the human brain the dreamer clings to his sleep, and fears the moment of his awakening, which he is dimly conscious is approaching.

But, so far, no blow had fallen on the girl, each day came to her like a messenger loaded with new gifts. Time was her ally, and every morning the

huge mirror, between its velvet hangings, showed her a face that grew more lovely, a form that grew more perfect, as it developed, flower-like, in this atmosphere, mental and physical, of warmth and light; and though, in reality, Everest's feet were already on that cold bridge that leads from youth to age, no trace yet of that awful, slow destruction of the human frame could be detected in the lithe, active body, nor in the clear-skinned, handsome face. The tremendous energy that filled them both prevented any day seeming one moment too long for them: its twenty-four hours barely sufficed them for what they wanted to do in it.

Everest knew Egypt well, as he did Nubia, the Soudan, Abyssinia and much of the heart of Africa, but he took an immense interest in Regina's initiation and education. She was so well worth teaching! She loved learning so much, and learnt so easily and rapidly! A good part of their mornings were given up to the study of Arabic, which Everest spoke perfectly himself. One of the girl's great joys was to hear him talk when the Arab sheiks or other native visitors came to see them on their boat, and she longed eagerly for the time when she would converse easily with them, as he did. Then she must learn to ride perfectly and easily anything that might be necessary at any moment, camel, horse or donkey, and the dahabeeyah was stopped by his orders for many days, at the most interesting spots, so that they might take long rides together. And these camel races over limitless tracts of desert sand! what a source of wildest joy and elation they were to her.

Everest would have the boat pulled up by some large native village or settlement, and send his servants on shore to scour it for camels.

When some good-looking beast had been found, and sent up, he would go himself, and personally examine it. Every cloth and covering would be stripped from the camel by his orders, and then its condition and skin carefully examined. The least sore or any pain-giving defect caused rejection. He would only hire for his amusement animals that could give it to him without distress. Finally, when two camels were eventually selected, they were given food and water under his personal supervision, and then left to rest in sheltered repose till the next day. Under these circumstances, the camels on the following morning were ready and fit and willing to go any distance, and those long flying, swinging rides that she and Everest took together were a source of great delight to Regina, delight greatly heightened by Everest's care of the beasts themselves.

"I hate to hear a camel cry," he replied once to her eager praise. "I know them so well — they are so good and gentle and patient and when they scream as they do it means they are in terrible suffering."

And all his camels ever did was to gurgle with pleasure, whenever he approached them. He seemed to possess a magnetic power over animals, to speak to them in their own language. They never resisted him, nor resented anything he did. They seemed to have an instinctive belief in his knowledge of their troubles and requirements. And no trait in a man could have bound Regina so closely to him as this did; no quality evoked a greater admiration.

In their journey up the Nile, in their excursions into the desert, they were often brought face to face with animal distress, caused by the wanton cruelty or carelessness of the Arabs, or the still more shameless callousness of the British tourist.

One morning they had been roused at daybreak by a piercing scream from a camel on the bank, and both had hurried ashore, to find a group of Arabs and one irate Englishman standing round a camel, that was kneeling on the ground and resisted all persuasions of the camel-driver's goad and the Britisher's boot to get up. It was screaming, crying and groaning by turns, appealing in every way it could to the pitiless crowd for help and mercy. Regina was white and trembling with sympathy, Everest unmoved outwardly, and determined, when they broke into the circle.

"Here, this tiresome beast won't get up," remarked the tourist. "At this rate I sha'n't get out and back before noon."

"It has a wound or a sore probably under the girth, which hurts when it rises," suggested Everest.

"I don't care what the devil's the matter with it," returned the other savagely, "as long as it'll get up and let me get on to it."

"Then you ought to care," replied Everest sternly; "it's people like you who encourage the camel-drivers to be cruel." And he added in Arabic: "Stand back, all of you!"

The crowd, impressed by the commanding figure and the set gravity of the face, all fell back, except the driver, who edged up behind him, and pulled at his sleeve.

"Don't you go near that camel, mister; he very dangerous beast, very savage; bad camel that, he bite."

Everest turned upon him, and said, as before, in Arabic:

"Stand back. Keep away from the camel."

The man fell back, and Everest went forward quite alone to the complaining beast, who on seeing him approach, and fearing some new form of torture from a fresh enemy, burst into a fresh series of its anguished cries. When he was a little distance from it, Everest stopped and began to talk to it in Arabic, in low caressing tones, and all the crowd stood silent, wide-eyed and staring, and Regina watched him, her heart beating and swelling with love and delight in him. After a few moments the camel's shrieks fell to moans and groans, and finally to silence. It turned its intelligent head this way and that, listening intently to the soft Arabic words of encouragement and sympathy. When it was quite silent, Everest drew near to it, and knelt down, putting his hand gently on the saddle girth, when the creature winced and moaned. It swung its head round towards him, but did not offer to bite, and Everest talked to it again, while his strong, supple fingers worked at the unfastening of the girth. It was difficult to get at, owing to the animal's position, but with infinite patience and calm he accomplished it, the camel watching him and listening to his voice all the time. As the girth was loosened, some blood splashed out on his hand and cuff, and as he drew the band aside a wound, in which a man might lay his closed fist, was revealed.

The camel winced and moaned a little, but seemingly breathed more easily when the tight band was loosened.

“Now you can get up,” Everest said, exactly as he would have done to a human being, and the camel, groaning slightly, but otherwise not protesting, rose to its feet, while the blood trickled slowly down its foreleg from the wound. Everest stroked and caressed its neck as it stood beside him, and then turned upon the driver.

Regina heard him, in an unbroken flow of Arabic, which she could only partially follow, abuse the man for using an animal in that state, and threaten him with every kind of punishment if he persisted in hiring out that or any other camel in a similar condition.

The man, not knowing in the least who this magnificent and authoritative person might be, turned all colours, and vowed and protested complete and absolute submission, and said he had another camel, only it was worth eight shillings a day, and the English mister had said he couldn’t give more than six, so he wouldn’t give him his best camel, but now indeed he would, if this great lord would spare his life and possessions. The scene ended by Everest taking the man’s name and address down in his note-book, and ordering the camel to be led off by his own servants to have its wound dressed.

When he looked round for the British tourist he had vanished, and some hours late Everest and Regina returned to their boat for breakfast. Such and similar incidents were not uncommon, and each

of them seemed to send a gold barb down deep into her heart, pinning fast into her consciousness a memory that could never be torn out.

And gradually, though she had never thought of or wished for children, she delighted in the idea now of bearing them to this man. If she could produce beings with his beauty, grace, strength and intellect, and that dear character of his, and give them to the world, that was a work, after all, worth doing; and hopes, like fairies, came to her now, from day to day, and ideas and thoughts that became almost a conviction, but she said nothing of it. She would wait till she was quite sure. There was plenty of time.

And besides the riding of every kind in the desert, there was the shooting. Everest was so anxious she should shoot well and easily, and two or three times in the week they would go out to distant sandbanks or hill ridges, where they could practise in safety. All kinds of marks and distances were arranged for her: moving objects running on a string, held by servants, and balls thrown into the air gave her quickness and dexterity, with both rifle and pistol.

The days when there was no shooting practice there was the painting, and they sat side by side on the cool upper deck, with the curtains rolled up on some enchanting prospect, each absorbed in giving it duplicate life upon the canvas.

And when the painting tired there was the playing, that they both loved, and so the happy, busy days flew by, each filled to the brim and overflowing with work and exercise, artistic creation and love. Deliciously tired with accomplishment, they fell into

each other's arms at night, while the boat glided on by moonlight, to fresh scenes, where the dawn would break.

Now, as they sat in the sunset hour, watching the light fall over the desert, Regina's thoughts swept back over all the days and nights of that glorious, golden month, and she felt almost afraid of the perfection of her happiness.

"That man is late with the post," remarked Everest, looking at his watch. "Didn't we send him ashore at six?"

"I'm not in a hurry for letters," answered Regina. "Nothing could make me more happy than I am, anything might make me less!"

Everest laughed, and continued a little sketch of a lonely palm he was making in his note-book, and just then the Arab messenger, with the mail bag, came on to the verandah and saluted them.

There was an immense number of letters as usual for Everest. He opened most of them with indifference, read and laid them down, without comment.

There were a few for Regina, which she left on the table, unopened. She did not wish to miss the transient glory of the sunset. And, as she said, there was nothing, nothing, nothing, that she wanted in this world.

"What a confounded bore!" exclaimed Everest suddenly over a letter. "Sybil and her brother are coming out, and want to join our camp. . . . Isn't that tiresome?"

Regina went suddenly cold in the warm and roseate air.

"Oh, Everest, I am sorry!"

"A girl like that! So utterly unfit for camp life!" he went on. "It's such a responsibility, and that ass of a brother of hers is such a bore too."

"Can't you wire to them that you don't want them?"

Everest laughed his amused, easy laugh.

"Well, it's a little awkward! Besides, it won't make much difference to Miss Sybil if she intends to come."

Regina rose with a swift, sudden movement from her chair, and came over to his. Her face looked white in the warm light, her mouth had a resolution in its lines that Everest had never seen before.

"You have been perfectly content and happy all this time, haven't you?" she asked. "You don't want or need anybody else? You have no personal wish that these people should come?"

"Not a bit," he answered, looking up at her with a smile. "I think they would be a great bore. We are absolutely happy alone, and so we shall be in camp. We don't want anybody."

"Then wire you won't have them: that they can't come." She spoke with unusual decision for her, in talking with him. Generally it was her pleasure to give way to him in everything. In fact she cared about nothing so long as he was pleased. But now, this was important: there was danger ahead to her happiness, and she rose to defend it, as a lioness to defend her cub.

"I think this is the first thing I have asked of you," she added, as he hesitated: "to send this wire."

Everest clasped both his arms round the slim, supple waist, as she stood by him.

“ My sweet, of course I will send one if you wish. You write out just what you would suggest, and I’ll give it to Salah to take now.”

Regina bent down and kissed him on the thick waves of his black hair, with a swift, passionate enthusiasm.

“ Thank you so much,” she murmured. Then she went into the body of the boat, behind them, and wrote out the wire:

“ Regret your suggestion to join our camp quite impossible. Many reasons.—EVEREST.”

“ Will that do? ” she asked, bringing it back, and showing it to him.

“ First rate,” he answered, and the telegram was sent.

No response of any kind came to the wire, either by letter or telegram, and the Lanarks continued their dreaming, lingering journey up to Wady Halfa by boat, undisturbed, and thence by train across the desert to Khartoum.

They arrived there one burning midday, when the sun seemed a blazing disk of fire against a burnished copper sky, and went to the hotel to rest. All their staff of servants and camp equipment had already arrived and were awaiting them. They had a large, cool-looking room assigned to them on the ground floor. Its three lofty windows were tightly closed by green, wooden shutters, made like a rigid Venetian blind, and nothing of the heat and glare of the outside was visible, except the blinding bars of light between the slats. The room was full of green light, and a matting crackled under their feet on the floor.

A large white mosquito net hung round the bed. Above it, in a corner of the rafters that supported the ceiling, a sparrow had built its nest, and long trails of grass and straw hung down the wall.

Outside one heard the peculiar cry of the wood, as an Egyptian water-wheel was slowly revolved in the garden.

Regina looked round with delight, as she and Everest entered together and closed the door. Somehow the spirit of the East was in the room, and it took her to itself and enfolded her, and she knew for the first time that peculiar joy and elation that the East can give to those who are sensitive to its magic breath.

They were tired after the three and a half days' journey in the vibrating train, and lay down under the mosquito net, and slept peacefully away the hot, sun-scorched afternoon.

It was time to dress for dinner when they awoke, and the cool sunset air was filling the room.

Regina opened the long green shutters of one window, and gave an exclamation of delight as she looked out into the paradise of palms beyond. How cool, how deliciously green it was, and how delicately each branch of the palm-trees outlined itself in gold against the brilliant, gleaming sky! A hedge, a beautiful wall of pomegranate, was just below the window ledge. She could put her hands down amongst its glowing, vivid, scarlet flowers, and, beyond, the whole garden was a mass of white roses, threaded everywhere by little sandy paths, beneath the palms. She turned from the window at last,

with regret, and began to dress. They were both nearly ready when someone knocked at the door, and as Everest opened it one of the hotel servants handed him a card.

He took it back into the room and read it:

“ Damn!” was all he said, as he laid it down.

Regina looked at him, her heart beating. He dismissed the servant and closed the door. Then he came over to the girl, who was fastening her pearls round her neck, before the mirror. She turned to face him. She saw he was very much annoyed.

“ This is Merton’s card,” he said; “ he is here in the hotel, and his sister too. Now,” he added, as Regina sank down on a chair by her, with an expression of distress on her face, “ you sent the telegram, as you wished, from Assuan, and, as I told you, it has made no difference. These people are here, and doubtless want to join us. I must ask you not to press me to be discourteous to them in any way.”

Regina looked up at him, as he stood before her, the card in his hand, and her eyes swam suddenly with tears. She always admired him, particularly in his evening dress, and at this moment, pale from the heat, fresh and calm after his long sleep, his face looked extremely handsome. But it seemed to her that never before had he spoken so coldly to her, so sternly, as if she had already been guilty of some act he disapproved. Lost in that great tide of love she had for him, utterly helpless to oppose him in any way, as any human being becomes once the chains of passion are bound round him, the girl clasped her hands together on her breast, and merely faltered,

while the tears she could not hold back, slipped down her cheeks:

"Certainly. . . . Of course you must do just as you wish about them."

Everest stooped down and kissed her.

"My darling, there is no need to cry about it. They can't do us any harm. If they join camp with us for a time, we can go on alone afterwards. I don't think it's wise or right to quarrel with them and make enemies of them."

After what he had said, and the tone and manner in which he had spoken, the girl felt it would be unwise to urge anything in dissent or opposition. She bent her head over his hands, and kissed them in silence, and Everest took Merton's card and tore it into shreds, as if he felt he would like to wring the owner's neck, and threw them into the grate.

Meanwhile, in two other rooms, on the opposite side of the hotel, Sybil and her brother were also dressing for dinner. She was in her room, and through the open communicating door she heard her brother ask the servant, when he returned from the Lanarks' room, what the recipient had said on getting his card.

"The gentleman only said 'Damn' sir," returned the man impassively.

Sybil heard this answer in her room, and she looked into the mirror opposite her and laughed.

When the Lanarks came down from their room the head waiter met them at the foot of the stairs.

"Mr. Graham said, sir, he was sure you'd like to dine with his party, so I reserved a table for six, in the window, for you all together."

Regina saw Everest knit his brows, but he only nodded and said:

"Where are the Grahams now?" And, on being told they were in the little saloon, moved in that direction.

"We had better go there and get the introductions over," he said to her, and she assented.

The saloon was fairly full of guests when they entered, but Regina's eyes found at once the tiny and beautiful figure of the girl who had called at her flat. She was exquisitely dressed now in white satin, covered with lace, and embroidered all over with pearls. Her ivory arms and shoulders were bare, her golden head bound round with pearls. She came forward at once, with her hand outstretched, when she caught sight of Everest, and Regina thought what a delicate, fairy-like vision of beauty she looked.

"Oh, Everest, I am so glad to see you! And now you'll introduce me to your wife, won't you? It was so horrid of you to carry her off up the Nile, just like a brigand with his captive!"

She spoke charmingly, and smiled at Regina, who saw instantly the line she was going to take. She was going to assume that Regina was Everest's wife, for her own purposes, because, otherwise, she could hardly have associated with her; but Regina guessed that she was convinced they were not married, and that Everest was still obtainable for herself. She saw, too, the girl did not mean to allude to the visit to the flat. Regina did not feel sure whether she really recognised her or not. At any rate it was evidently her cue to meet her as a stranger.

Everest presented Regina to both his cousins, and Regina bowed in silence.

The Honourable Merton Graham was tall and thin and fair, like his sister, without possessing her beauty. He looked hard at Regina, as he was introduced, and said he was so glad to meet her; to which she responded only with a smile. There were two other men with the Grahams, and they were in turn presented. One, a middle-aged man, with rather a pleasant face, was introduced to her by Graham as Surgeon-Doctor James.

“Not one of the modern school, who are mad on operations and mutilations, and long to divide you into pieces as soon as they look at you,” he added, laughing, “but really quite a kind, respectable person.”

And as Regina looked at him, and smiled, she felt that he deserved this description, and for reasons of her own she was not wholly displeased that a doctor would be with them if they were going to stay a long time in camp.

The fourth man of their party was presented as Colonel St John, who had a good record of big-game shooting in India, and he favoured Regina with a long, admiring stare. She looked very well this evening, in a gown of palest green that Everest had chosen for and given her. A circle of great pearls enclosed her throat, and she had set two pearl and emerald stars in her soft, shining hair. She had no need to feel envy of the new-comer, and did not. She only felt cold dislike and fear.

She saw that the girl had come out, as it were, armed to the teeth, and in face of all obstacles, to

fight with her for the possession of Everest, and that the desire for the man was intense enough to make her risk all dangers, and accept a life for which she was totally unfitted, and which she must hate. To gain her end she was willing to risk spoiling her beauty, injuring her health, possibly even giving up her life. Not an adversary to be considered lightly.

As soon as the introductions were over they went in to dinner. Everest took his cousin in first, then Graham and Regina followed, and the doctor with Colonel St John came in last. Regina watched Everest and the tiny, exquisite, white-clothed figure precede her, with a curious feeling. It was the first time she had seen him with another woman, except her own sisters at the Rectory, and she noticed directly that the calm of absolute indifference which had characterised his bearing then with them was absent here. He seemed pleased, animated, as he bent over and talked with her. Regina could see the wonderfully exquisite profile of the girl as she turned her face up to him, and could feel the admiration in Everest's gaze as he looked down upon her. He did evidently admire her, and, in fact, it would be hard for anyone to do anything else. Regina divined what was the actual fact, that his cousin did possess for Everest a charm and fascination nearly irresistible when she was with him, and not wishing to be conquered by it he had kept away from her.

What would be the result now of this continual contact that the girl had chosen — wisely enough if she wanted him — to force upon him? Regina's ears seemed ringing with this question as she took

her place at the table opposite the two ; the dazzling beauty of all the delicate ivory carving, which yet was not ivory but white, pale-tinted flesh, seemed for a moment to swim before her eyes. Her heart seemed to contract and grow cold as her brain formed the pitiless answer — victory for the woman. With her learning, her knowledge and her intuition it was impossible for her to believe that a man already attracted towards it could withstand the siege of beauty like this daily, hourly, beside him, asking only to be taken, conquered and enjoyed.

A calmness, like the calmness in the face of death, came over her, and it showed how true to herself and her own nature she was that the first thought which came to her in that calm was not "What a pity I did not marry him before," as ten thousand other women would have said in such a moment, but "How fortunate that we are not married, that he is free, quite free, to do just as he wishes."

And she gazed at Everest's dark, brilliant face, all light and smiles, across the glass and flowers, and heard his talk and laughter as a man on trial for his life may gaze at the judge opposite him who holds the balance of his existence in his hands.

All this time Graham and St John were talking to her and courses being set before her. It seemed a very long dinner, but at last the dessert was brought, which she refused, and sat idly with her hands in her lap, listening to the discussions of the future camp which now circulated round her, and in which both Graham and St John took an active part, thus leaving her in peace.

The incoming party of four wished the camp to

be in common, and all expenses shared equally between them all, but Everest was quite firm and determined on the point that they should come as his guests, and on no other footing, if they joined camp with him at all.

"I am much too selfish," he declared, with his easy laugh, "to be in a camp where there are four masters, to say nothing of two queens. If I am host I get things my own way, and make all the arrangements, and give all the orders that suit me. I shall be delighted if you like to join my camp as guests, but it would be quite impossible for me to camp under any other conditions."

A silence fell on the table, and to Regina her heart seemed to cease beating while she waited for it to be decided. Oh, how she hoped they would refuse. The men would have done so, she was sure, but Sybil threw a decided glance across to Merton and said simply:

"Thank you, Everest, so much. Of course we will come. You are always a delightful host."

Graham said nothing, but looked at his plate. The other men being merely guests of the Grahams could say nothing.

Regina's face was pale and Everest's clouded when they all rose from the table.

"We have a splendid outfit for ourselves," Sybil continued, as they moved together to the door. "We sha'n't poach on any of your preserves. We have tents, servants, furniture, everything. They are all out at the oasis. I found out where you'd sent yours, and, as I knew you'd like us to join you, I had all ours sent there too."

Everest's face did not grow any more pleased looking at this statement.

"You did not have my wire, I suppose?" he asked, as they passed into the hall.

"What wire?" inquired Sybil, with an innocent expression.

"I don't know that it matters if you didn't get it," he answered. "You had none at all from me?" His eyes were on her face and she coloured slightly as she shook her head.

"No, Everest; I have not heard from you since you left England."

Everest made no further remark and they joined the others on the terrace outside for coffee.

Regina stepped out into the hot, lustrous night with a feeling of joy. Khartoum was beautiful, she thought, with its waving palms lifting their feathery tops towards the purple sky, which seemed to beat and pulsate, so thickly studded over it were the palpitating stars, and down there just at the end of the garden were the dark waters of the Nile.

She wished so much she could have remained with Everest alone; how they would have sat here together, drinking in the warm bauble-scented air, listening to the curious cry of the water-wheel, watching the stars flash and wheel suddenly in a great arc of light across the purple sky.

She sat silent, looking away from all the others into the mystery of the tropic night. The men were talking together.

Sybil leant back in her chair; where a ray of light from the saloon window struck on her golden head and gleamed on her satin and pearls.

Regina heard it being arranged that they were all to go over early next morning to the camp on a preliminary visit to see if all were ready and in order, the real start up the White Nile to be made on the following day.

"We had better go to bed now," Everest said, rising. "We must start as soon as it's light: it's so painfully hot and burning here after ten."

They all rose, and St John and the doctor went into the bar to get just one more liqueur before turning in. The Grahams paused, saying good-night and Merton added to Everest:

"I was sorry not to send you a reply to your wire, but Sybil didn't want to; she said it would be all right when we got here."

Everest made no answer whatever. A silence that seemed thick in its intensity followed, and then Sybil broke into a laugh. She knew already that Everest had no admiration for her character, no confidence in her word. She was not relying on those things, or this speech of her brother's would have been a serious matter. She relied solely on the perfect lines of her face, and these were the same whether she lied or otherwise.

"I am sorry Merton has been so injudicious as to tell you the truth," she said lightly. "It's such a stupid habit of his. I am always trying to correct him. We got your wire, of course, but I knew you wouldn't mind when we were really here."

Everest looked down upon her in the ray of gold light.

"Brothers and sisters should agree, especially about the lies they are going to tell," he answered,

laughing too. "Good-night," and he stepped into the saloon, holding wide the door for Regina, and they both went up to their room.

As soon as they were inside, and the door locked, he came up to her and drew her into his arms. She was a beautiful vision in her pale silk, with her soft waving hair and the pearls gleaming on her firm stainless breast.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am about all this, because it delays our marriage," he said, in a low tone of passionate annoyance; "we can't simply do anything now about it, can we?"

"Oh no; certainly not," she replied impulsively, "and — and I could not marry you now — just yet — before —" She could not finish her sentence. She burst into tears, the advent of these others was so hateful to her, she was so disappointed and excited and strained, she lost control of herself for the moment and bent her face down sobbing on his arm. He stroked all the rich, lustrous hair gently.

"Sweetest, nothing matters; I don't care about anything except for the pleasure of knowing you belong to me and of giving you any advantage that there is in marriage. But now you see we can't call these people to witness that we've been together all this time without it. Unconventional as I am supposed to be, nobody would stand that, and it would be so unsatisfactory for you afterwards. We could not marry quietly here now — Sybil would be sure to find out."

Regina's tears had ceased: she looked up.

“Don’t think of it,” she said simply. “For the present it is out of the question.”

She disengaged herself from his clasp and sank into an arm-chair, her handkerchief pressed to her lips. She was white and trembling, her limbs hardly seemed able to support her.

It was quite possible their marriage would never be now, but that was not oppressing her, the iron fetters of a legal tie that bound him unwilling, unloving, unhappy to her, what would they be to her, who longed after his love and desire and pleasure in her? If these were hers, she wanted nothing else, if they were not hers, nothing else would console her.

Everest stood by the bed, mechanically winding up his watch.

“I know you are sorry at their joining us,” he said, after a minute. “But I think if I had absolutely refused, it would have been such a slight to Sybil she would never have forgiven either of us. She is my next neighbour, our lands touch each other, and it would be a pity, for your sake, to have her as an enemy.”

“I am only afraid at the end of our camping together she will be more of an enemy than you would make her now by refusing to take her.”

“Why should you think so?” he answered, looking over to her.

Regina was silent. It did not seem wise to tell him that Sybil was doing all merely to win him for herself, and that nothing short of that would content her, and that her failure would inevitably embitter her for life. The incense to a man’s vanity is

so often in itself such an attraction towards a woman.

Perhaps the camping might be short; Sybil might find it impossible to stand the rough life; anything might occur to break it up. It could do no good in any case for her to put before Everest's eyes in glowing colour this girl's passion for himself.

"It's difficult to say exactly, but you know how people generally disagree and all grow to hate each other on these expeditions."

"Well, we must try to be as amicable as we can," returned Everest, smiling. "I know Regina will be, to please me."

And Regina, looking at him, knew that she must indeed do as he wished, that his will was absolute law to her, by reason of that magic power he had to make her happy or unhappy by his glance. Man's prayer throughout the ages to beauty has always been: "Be what you will, act as you will, only give me the privilege of looking at and loving you."

In the early dawn the whole party assembled and started out for the camp. The sky was still softly grey, the air light, almost cool. The gay, wonderful, joyous river rolled blue and clear between its banks covered by lovely feathered throngs, drinking and spreading out their multi-coloured wings to the early light. The palms tossed their swaying branches in the little breeze that comes before the sun.

They rode out on three camels with their guides, and Regina felt her spirits rise as the cool current of air off the river struck her forehead, lifting the waving curls beneath her wide-brimmed hat. She looked wonderfully well this morning, and all the three

men looked at her with admiration as she sat behind Everest on the saddle-cloth.

It was certainly a very fine encampment when they came up to it; they saw that the servants had set up all the tents and got everything in working order. There were six white tents in all, and innumerable smaller ones for the kitchens and servants. Everest had arranged a large wall tent for their sleeping-room, and another square one for the dining and living room, and a smaller one for the keeping of the game, heads, skins, etc. To these the Grahams had added a tent each for Merton and his sister, another larger one being shared by St John and the doctor. There was a scent of coffee in the air as they approached, and one of Everest's servants opened the dining tent door with an air of unmistakable pride and confidence, revealing within a well-set and most inviting-looking breakfast.

They all trooped in, and Regina was appointed to the head of the table and to pour out the coffee. Sybil overnight had had a long and earnest talk with young Graham, and the result of this was that all present now accepted and deferred to Regina and Everest absolutely as host and hostess. Sybil knew her cousin's character pretty well, and she saw that the one condition he had made of their joining them must be carried out to the letter. She would give him no excuse for withdrawing his invitation. Regina felt happy at the breakfast. There was excitement in going out into the savage desert, just their own little party, alone, to meet lions and unknown and mysterious dangers. This was life, movement anyway, it was not the slow death that was consum-

ing her sisters at the English Rectory. There would be room for courage, for energy, for endurance here, and she loved action. She felt like a strong young swimmer breasting the first turbulent, incoming wave as he leaves the shore.

Everyone praised the breakfast, and the cook was called in, beaming, to the tent and congratulated.

Then Everest and the other men went off to the gun tent to look up maps and plans and decide their route, the question of the servants they should take, the pack animals, the chance of native villages along the Nile where fresh provisions could be got, and all the hundred other things appertaining to camp life; and Regina, not caring for Sybil's society alone, went over to the sleeping tent and walked round it, admiring the beautiful camp furniture. Everest had provided everything so perfectly folding, collapsible and adjustable. Here a camp sofa, low and light yet steady, and there a folding breakfast-table fully equipped with tiny silvery kettles and cups and everything necessary for their early tea or coffee, that they would have here alone. And he had been so thoughtful for her too. There were a couple of new dust-proof trunks with perfect lids and locks that she might pack all her personal things in conveniently and be sure they would not be hurt, and quite a large mirror, because he knew she hated to be without one, with a wood flap to cover its face in travelling. She sat down at last in a folding-chair in the centre, and looked round, supremely content with her future residence.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LIONS OF THE DESERT

AGAINST the blinding brazen glare of the African sky the green tops of the palms of the oasis of Tel-el-kelb waved gratefully and threw their precious shade over the white tents clustered at their feet. It was high noon and the heat, here, away from the magic breeze that is always found on the Nile, was intense.

It was a large encampment altogether, the low brown canvas tents at the back, far in the grove of palms, indicating the servants' quarters, the higher and larger white ones, grouped together more towards the edge of the trees, showed European comfort in the midst of their severe simplicity.

At the door of the largest white tent sat Regina, looking out with her clear blue eyes, gazing from the wavering shadow of the palms far into the sunlit distances of the desert that stretched away in limitless tawny ripples to the far horizon, broken here and there by exquisite shallow lakes of azure surrounded by black rocks and stunted trees which mirrored themselves in the shining water.

Ah, those lakes! — those wonderful lakes of the desert, which, when one walks towards them, vanish utterly, and on the spot where they have been — shining water, rocks and trees — looks up to mock

one only the glittering yellow sand. The mirage of the desert, how wonderful it is. It had for Regina a fascination, a magnetic influence upon her that she could neither explain nor resist. It seemed she could never tire of gazing out on those magic shining phantom waters of the waste. She looked very pale as she sat there, her chin leaning on her hand, her elbow on her knee, across which rested the deadly little rifle. She wore a short brown canvas skirt reaching only to her knees; below the beautifully moulded calves and ankles were encased in brown gaiters fitting tightly over the tops of her neat, low-heeled boots. A loose blouse of the same colour was drawn in tightly by the heavy belt full of cartridges that enclosed her waist. She was wearing no hat and the yellow light flung up from the sanded floor turned her hair into soft gold above the pallor of her face.

A month, she was thinking, had gone by since Sybil had joined them, and they had all gone into camp. And how she had suffered in those thirty days! A little at first and then more and more with each day that passed, a long and terrible *crescendo*, as it were, of suffering.

The girl had come out, as Regina had thought, and as she now knew, with the deliberate intention of taking Everest away from her, and she had pursued this plan with a callousness and an ingenuity that was simply inconceivable. The extreme cleverness of all her tactics seemed to Regina wonderful in a person who, outside this one idea, appeared to have absolutely no brains at all.

The main feature of her scheme was an excessive

amiability towards Regina, nothing could exceed her apparent admiration, affection and respect for her. And by this attitude, from the first, she completely disarmed Everest, as Regina recognised with a deep pain in her heart. Clever and keen as he usually was in penetrating most people's masks and shams, and understanding their real motives and feelings, he seemed to be completely deceived by this girl's clever acting. It was so well done, never overdone, but always perfectly even, natural and genuine, that Regina, to a certain extent, understood this. Any man, lacking as he does the keen female intuitive instinct about these things, would have been deceived in the same way. It was always "What would Mrs. Lanark like?" when any expedition was proposed, anything suggested, and a charming turn of the golden head with a world of affectionate inquiry in the blue eyes. "Would *you* like to go out," or "Are you tired, dear, after yesterday?" and so on, and Regina saw no other way than to accept all this poisonous affection and be gentle and amiable in return.

Everest, who would have resented the least courtesy towards Regina, began to feel in this way an attraction towards the pretty, fairy-like creature who was so devoted to the woman he loved, and quite lost his suspicions that she would make mischief and disagreement in the camp.

To Everest himself she was submission and flattery personified. She listened devoutly to all he said, never held a contrary opinion to his, was always willing to adapt herself to his or Regina's wishes. She would do this or that which was con-

venient, either stay in camp or go with them; ride whatever was provided for her, do whatever was desired, and in the evenings sang and played divinely on the guitar which she had brought with her. Her beauty seemed to increase daily, and to Regina the reason for this was perfectly clear. She was playing a most exciting, difficult and successful game, and the excitement and joy of it lent to her that peculiar beauty of intense animation which no other can equal.

There was no doubt that she coveted Everest personally, with all the force of which she was capable, and Nature is always on the side of any individual fighting for a mate. She lends beauty and charm to the female as she lends power and magnetism to the male.

And Everest closely in contact with this young, beautiful, insistent woman, who was new to him, felt that transient sensory desire for her which is a purely natural spontaneous impulse in natures like his, full to the brim of energy and vigour, possessing both far in excess of the demands of daily life.

His love for Regina went very deep into his whole organisation, and his power of self-control was strong, therefore had he realised at the first that he was going to do anything to make his idol unhappy he would have strenuously resisted the new invading passion. But, as in all these cases the beginnings are imperceptible, the slope of the hill is far slipped down by the unwary feet before they even feel they are descending.

In this case Sybil had masked her advances with infinite care. Of course there could be no love-mak-

ing, no flirtation, between them now. He was a married man, she knew, bound to that lovely and exquisite Regina for ever and ever; but there could be such a nice camaraderie between them; they were such old friends and cousins, and cousins might kiss each other, as they had always done, and her kisses were cousinly little things at first, so that, without in the least alarming him at the beginning, she established forms of intimacy that gradually afterwards she could fill with passion.

When he awoke to the passion in them it was too late: it had set fire to his own; he knew that he wanted those kisses, desired them, as he did the woman herself!

It is useless for those who read this record to frown and scowl and talk of his love for Regina and regard him as a monster because, while loving and possessing her, he desired another. His love for Regina had nothing to do with the question. One might as well argue that because one dines every night at home one never wants to dine out with a friend.

The idea of replacing Regina with Sybil never occurred to him. Regina was for him something he could never part with, a portion of his own life. All the feelings for her were so deep, so real, so intertwined with the mental emotions, it was impossible to compare them with those for Sybil. But she had the amazing power of novelty on her side; she had that charm for Everest that the unlearned language has for the student, the unknown country for the explorer; and when Regina at last appealed to him about the matter, he suddenly realised that the presence of Sybil, her society, the sight of her, her kisses,

gave him a keen pleasure that now he did not at all wish to give up.

The first time that Regina spoke to him of her own pain and distress was in their tent at night, alone, and Everest had come up to her and taken her into his arms.

“Dear little girl, how can you be so foolish? There is no one in the world for me except yourself.”

And this was quite true, for Everest had never felt for any woman the same feelings as he had done for her, and it never occurred to him that he could ever part with her. But the curious pleasure that his cousin’s face gave him, the momentary physical delight of her kiss, the joy of putting his arm round the tiny form and seeing her little teeth gleam in a smile upon him, all these were very dear to him, though he did not ever dream of her in any lasting relationship.

When Everest was alone he often wondered himself how it was that, knowing so well and disliking so greatly, as he did, this woman’s character and all her mentality, the physical charm of her presence, the sound, sight and touch of her could give so much pleasure. It seemed almost sometimes as if the fact that there was little sympathy, almost no point of union, between them, no attraction except the physical, seemed to heighten that physical attraction, increase its power. He knew perfectly well that, in order to please Regina and preserve her happiness, he ought to annihilate this new passion, which, insignificant as it really was with reference to his life as a whole, for the moment gave him so much pleasure; but then, was he bound to do this, he asked

himself. How far do the rights of others go? How far ought he to deny himself, sacrifice himself that she might enjoy to the full her life, instead of him enjoying his?

She had given him the extreme of pleasure, it is true, but in return he had laid everything he had at her feet. That she had not accepted his gifts in full was not his fault. He had not withdrawn any of them, nor ever would. The first place in his life, in his soul, was for her. Then they were equally in debt to each other, and now what was to be done? He wanted to enjoy this new pleasure, have this new excitement, and not being in any way an ideal character, but only an extremely passionate and rather selfish individual with some few delightful traits, he determined to take it — determined, that is to say, in that vague and indefinite manner that one always determines such things, driven by physical impulses, led by forces of which we know nothing, compelled by unseen powers, like the helpless, whirling leaf before the gale. There was no deliberate purpose, plan or intention. Imperceptibly he had grown interested in Sybil's playing and singing after dinner; her quaint, inconsequent prattle in its novelty amused him, though he quite well recognised it would be intolerable once its newness had worn off, her face from its great beauty of line had always pleased him immensely, her ardent kiss, with those exquisitely carved scarlet lips, had shaken his reason, and so from out of all these had grown gradually desire, which is merciless, blind, relentless, savage, quick in its onward rush, rapid in its disappearance as any desert lion.

Regina sat at her tent door and thought over all these things, and the burnished glory of the golden desert swam before her in a mist of tears.

She had not read and studied and thought as she had without acquiring that philosophy that knowledge gives, but no philosophy could help her against the deadly pain now of her daily life. As far as the shooting went, the camp up till now had not been a success. Small game and birds of every sort and kind there were in limitless numbers, but the lion district, according to their native guides, was always somewhere beyond. This range of hills, that ridge to the west, the lions had always retreated there, but when the whole party had duly packed and moved there, the new camp on the range of hills or on the western ridge was equally devoid of lion.

The men, except Everest, went out every day and shot what they could find, largely antelope, but Everest always having been prompted by his own nature against the taking of defenceless life, since his intimacy with Regina, had lost all desire or capability of doing it. If they came upon a lion he would shoot, the sporting chance was equal there, the danger shared, the game well able to look after itself; but with the taking of the beautiful innocent life which abounded all round them he would have nothing to do. Regina revolted utterly from it, and would never visit the large tent at the back of the camp where the antelope were hung and the flamingo flung in heaps, dead and dying together, their exquisite plumage making it seem as if a sunset cloud had fallen there.

At first Everest and Regina had spent together a

great deal of the time painting, and Sybil, who, though she could not hold a rifle straight herself, had no objection to seeing things killed, accompanied her brother and the others on their shoots. But latterly Everest had cared less about the sketching and had taken Sybil for camel rides in the desert, rides in which Regina could have joined had she been able to force herself to the pain of witnessing Everest's pleasure as he lifted his cousin on and off her camel, and the passion in his eyes as he spoke to and smiled upon her.

They had gone out to-day, and Regina had stayed in camp and practised her shooting all the morning. She could talk with the natives and she understood they were nearing the lion district, and she ardently longed if any occasion arose in which she could put her skill at Everest's service, or in his defence, to have it at her command, to show him all those dear lessons in the past happy time were not given in vain. She had shot splendidly. Not a single mark out of any of those which she had set herself had she missed, and her nerves, so excitable by all mental emotions, seemed to calm and steady themselves when her fingers closed on a rifle as they did when they took up her paint-brush.

Now she was tired, and she sat waiting for them to return, for the exquisitely painful pleasure of Everest's kiss, knowing that his lips had only recently left another's.

All the other three men were more or less in love with her in varying degrees, rather to Everest's amusement, but she only entertained a sick antipathy towards them and their blood-stained hands and

clothes, such as any ordinary person feels on meeting a butcher coming out of his shambles.

She insisted that they should come moderately clean to the dining tent and that the conversation at dinner should not be upon wounding and crippling, death agonies and blinded eyes and mangling shots, and as Everest backed her up in this they had to submit.

Immediately after dinner she withdrew to her own tent, leaving them to their smoking and brandy-drinking and their talk of blood and death. And sitting there alone, she could hear the soft tinkle of the guitar and the pretty girlish voice singing love songs under the palms where Sybil had gone, and where Everest, wearied also by the drinking, smoking and conversation in which he did not care to take a part, had followed her. How she suffered! Like a bodily illness, the sickness of jealousy seems to diffuse paralysing pain throughout the whole system.

Yet after that hour, or sometimes half-an-hour, of misery, when Everest himself came to the tent, and raising the door flap stepped inside, she rose to meet him with a smile and waves of intense happiness vibrated through her as her eyes took in his image. The sight of him, his presence near her had still that same tremendous power over her that it had had from the first. The sharp contrast that he presented to the other men they were now with seemed to heighten still further the effect upon her senses. When he came in, pale and calm as usual, his clear skin fresh and cool from the outside air, his dark eyes full of fire, and approached her, willing to kiss and caress

her, she knew she must forgive him everything, she wanted and desired him too much to do anything else. How different he seemed from the thick-skinned, burnt-faced, heavy-eyed men she had left in the dining tent, flushed with over-eating and drinking, soaked through with the scent of tobacco and brandy and of old blood on their clothes and of grease and mud on their shooting boots. Had they been models of fidelity and all the domestic virtues she would not have let one kiss her, hardly to save her life, so violently did they in themselves outrage her æsthetic sense, but by Everest, if she were mentally hurt and wounded, yet the physical compensations in himself were so overwhelming that she could not do otherwise than go on loving him, through all her suffering. Everest never came to her in the condition — dirty, untidy, smoky, semi-fuddled — that these men seemed to live in, if, indeed, he was ever in that condition at all, which seemed impossible in connection with him. The order and beauty of his rooms that had so intensified her love for him when she surprised him in London seemed always to be part of his person, his clothes, his atmosphere. Without ever in the least seeming to care about his dress or be conscious of his looks, he always seemed to be clean, well-attired, fresh, alert-eyed, as an officer going on parade.

And often in those night vigils, when the bitter gall of jealousy had risen to the brim of her nature and anger burnt in all her veins and a torrent of lava-like words waited on her tongue, and her brain seethed with madness, when he really came to her, all possible reproaches slipped from her mind; she

felt only inclined to fall upon her knees before him, as a slave girl before an emperor, and tell him how much she worshipped him.

As she sat now looking into the golden haze of the distance, which reddened softly as the sunset hour approached, she saw the light veils of dust rising which meant the nearing of the home-coming party, and she rose and retreated into her own tent. She guessed that Sybil and Everest would be riding together and she did not wish to see it. She found that when she did not actually see them together she suffered less. She knew with her reason that much of what so hurt her senses, looks, smiles, tones, even caresses, from a man of his nature, really meant very little, and therefore when her eyes and ears were not pained by them she was less disturbed. Behind these two would come the three sportsmen, and then all the horrid procession of limp, blood-covered bodies, masses of beautiful dead birds carried along by the troop of servants. That she did not wish to see either. So she retreated into the shadow and shelter of her tent and pulled down the door flap, knowing that Everest would come in when Sybil had dismounted and gone to her tent, and the three men with their spoils and their attendants had disappeared to the gun-room tent at the back.

She set her rifle in the corner after unloading it and slipped off her belt of cartridges, as it is hardly a comfortable adjunct to one's clothing in a close embrace, and while she did so she heard all the noise without of the return, the snuffing of the camels, the barking of dogs, the chatter of the natives, the dragging of the heavy antelope on the sand, and the scent

of blood and dust came to her nostrils through all the chinks of the tent.

She waited some time, but Everest did not come, and the sounds subsided outside. As all grew quiet again, she lifted a little window flap that was at one side of the tent and looked out into the green shade of the palm. Her heart gave a great bound and then seemed to stand still and tremble as a stricken deer. They were standing there, not twenty yards away, Sybil and Everest, their hands in each other's, apparently about to part. The girl's fair, pale face lifted to his showed distinctly against the deep shadow behind her.

Regina looked at Everest, and a sudden fury like the hot smoke of a fire rose over all her brain. A panting thirst after something not defined stirred in all her blood, and then came the query, like a voice in a dream: "Why not end this? Why not kill her?" She could do it so easily now as she stood there, a perfect mark for Regina, who could pierce a cactus leaf through the exact centre at twenty yards. She was very near to Everest, it was true, but Regina knew her aim so well — that calm white oval against the green. She could send a shot from her pistol out of the tent that would find it and shatter it for ever.

Without knowing it, in that instant of frightful jealous rage, her feet had carried her across the tent, her fingers had clasped her pistol and drawn it from her belt. Swift and silent as a shadow she was back at the little window; they were still there, nearer each other, that was all. She cocked the revolver and aimed it so that she covered the delicate

and perfect carving of that pale disk beneath the trees. Then her true self woke suddenly and rushed upon her, and her hand dropped to her side.

How mad, how foolish her impulse had been! Better turn the pistol on herself than that. Death was far better than to live dishonoured, burdened with the blood of another. Sybil had injured her enough already. She should not turn her into a murdereress; besides, death or injury to Sybil meant suffering for Everest, and in her wildest moments she had no wish to cause him pain or distress. To her, an object once loved was sacred. No faintest thought of revenge on *him* ever came near her mind.

He had offered to bind himself to her and she had refused. She had wished him to be free. Well then, how illogical, how absurd her attitude now, like that of a pettish child.

She closed the flap of the tent and sank down on the side of the bed and buried her face in her hands, lost in a sense of humiliation and self-condemnation.

Here Everest found her when he came in, and as she looked up and saw him enter, smiling and full of life, a sense of joy came to her that no mad act of hers had brought misery upon him and so upon them both. She rose as he approached her. She was very white, but she smiled up at him as she saw the look of concern come into his face.

“ You look so pale. Do you feel ill? Is the heat too much for you? ” he exclaimed anxiously.

“ No; I am quite well. I always get dull and miss you when you are out, that is all, ” she answered. She would not speak to him of Sybil. She knew in matters of love coercion is useless, words are use-

less, everything is useless. Like a malady, like a sickness, desire drifts across the brain and runs its course. Sometimes the sufferer dies, but more often he recovers and asks: "Was I ever ill?"

She took up the pistol and put it back in its place and busied herself with making tea for him, and all the time her mind was recalling the exquisite lines of Sophocles on love: "Like the icicle lying in the hot hand of the wondering boy it diminishes and vanishes even while he gazes on it and the harder, the tighter, he clasps it, the more rapidly does it disappear."

Day after miserable day went by for Regina, while the hate, which was wholly alien to her nature, for Sybil grew within her, and like some horrible physical growth hurt and oppressed her in the growing and seemed to poison her whole organisation.

If she could only have known clearly what Everest's feelings were; but he would not speak on the subject. He had admitted that he desired the girl, and all his assurances that nothing could affect his love for Regina might be merely to comfort her. At the best he wanted something that, but for her presence, he could and would have obtained. And to Regina her own duty, her course of conduct was not clear. She had brought with her into camp a few books, and among them "Anna Lombard," which she read and reread, finding in the position of Gerald Ethridge some reflection of her own. But to her, her situation seemed more difficult, her duty more obscure than his, for in Gerald's case he felt convinced that Anna's love for the Pathan could not bring her happiness, and therefore he could believe

himself justified in trying his utmost to turn her from it, but here the torturing thought would ever present itself to Regina that Sybil had every quality to fit her to be Everest's wife. She might well hold herself to be in the right and Regina in the wrong. She could bring to the man she married a large dower, noble rank, lands, old name. She was the bride picked out and selected for him by his own family and people, and now he himself desired her. In utter anguish of soul Regina asked herself again and again why was she standing between? The girl was beautiful too, and though, to Regina, the extreme disproportion of size between the cousins jarred and seemed unnatural, yet she had to admit that Nature worked that way, constantly making the male seek his opposite in his mate, so that the average of the type may be maintained.

She hated Sybil with the fierce natural hate of any human being for another who robs and despoils him of his dearest possessions, but logically she could not defend that hatred of her. In the eyes of the world she knew that Sybil and not herself would be given the better title to Everest.

If she could only have known what he thought, what he felt! If she could only have penetrated the mystery that had grown up round his feelings and relations to his cousin! But like all men he would not speak definitely or clearly to her about it. That silence of men! How much it has to account for! We have all heard of the crimes without number traced to and excused by the celebrated habit of "nagging" which belongs to women. No condemnation is too severe for it. No sympathy too exces-

sive to be given to the male sufferers from it. But what of that dogged brutal silence of men that corrodes and eats into the sensitive, excitable brain of a woman? For how many murders and suicides has that not been accountable?

In the whole world there is no lash more effective, no vitriol more corrosive than this silence in which men cloak their various infamies.

Everest had been far more outspoken than most men would have been, but he also, as the days went by, seemed to grow more reserved, more silent. A sort of abstraction seemed to enclose him, and often after a day's expedition, in the evening, when they had gone to their own tent — those evenings which formerly had been so dear to her — he would lie down on the camp sofa and fall apparently into a reverie which left him hardly conscious of her presence. Looking at him she could see his face had a pained, abstracted pallor on it. She could not tell of what he was thinking, but she knew that he was desiring another and that she stood between.

And the strain of all this was so great that it seemed to her she must escape from it or go mad. But there was no escape for any of them from each other. Like a lot of hostile animals in a cage, they were shut up together in the camp to quarrel as they chose, and on all sides the sandy waste hemmed them in.

One day she went out a little way from her tent with her easel and colours. She was alone. St John, James and Graham had gone out quite early, and Everest and Sybil, after luncheon, had strolled away together among the palms. She did not know

where they had gone, nor did it matter. She never sought to spy upon them or follow them or to see where they went or what they did. The fact that Everest wished to be with the girl was all that mattered. The intense bitterness of this knowledge was so overwhelming that all detail of pain and distress was lost in it.

To-day, left alone in the suffocating heat of mid-day in the tent, with nothing but her hatred of Sybil, her passion for Everest and her sick misery in the present situation for companion, she felt as if her brain would give way.

She must get out, under the open sky, in the shade of the grove, and perhaps she could lose herself temporarily in some inspiration. She must, in some way, break up the maddening circle of her thoughts. Suppose she lost her reason and killed or injured Everest! The mere thought filled her with cold horror and fear. Never, never, never, whatever he did, however he made her suffer, would she in her sane moments retaliate, never could she hurt or harm this man who had given her so much happiness. But after all the brain is an unstable thing — she would not know what she did if the veil of madness were suddenly drawn over it.

Oppressed by this new thought, she gathered her painting materials together and wandered slowly through her tent door towards the shadiest part of the grove.

There were two palms leaning a little together which caught her eye, and between them a tiny brown tent by a clump of banana-trees, the whole forming a little picture in glowing light and wavering shade,

and she dropped down here, weary and heart-sick, putting up her easel and trying to set her mind upon her work.

Her talent was so great that even in that state of pain and suffering her hand obeyed her will almost mechanically, and she soon had the whole sketched in on the paper.

She was just commencing the colouring when she heard voices close to her and quivered and grew deadly pale as she recognised Everest's and its gentle tones.

"I do love you so much," she heard Sybil's voice saying, "and you are beginning to love me too, now just a little, do say you do?"

And Everest answered:

"Does this not seem like it?" And just at that moment the two figures came in view round a palm close to those under which she was sitting, and she saw him bend over the girl and kiss her.

Regina had seen them kiss before, as Sybil had insisted on these cousinly habits from the first, but this was a different thing. This was neither a greeting nor a leave-taking. It was the kiss of pleasure, prompted by passion, sought for by the man.

Regina felt absolutely paralysed by the agony of witnessing it. She could not move, and for a moment could hardly breathe. Like those who looked on the Gorgon's head, she felt turning into stone.

As Everest raised his head after their kiss they both saw her. They could not do otherwise, opposite her and only a few yards away. All three for the first second remained rigid and staring, then Sybil burst away with a half scream. Everest let her go,

not seeming to notice her as she ran towards the camp. He stood for a moment where he was, then he walked up to Regina.

The colour burned in the clear cheek, his eyes were kindling with excitement and anger. He looked splendidly, cruelly handsome as he approached her. She could not move. Fascinated like a little kid put into the python's cage, she stared at him as he came up.

“Regina!” there was a sharp ring of annoyance and anger in his voice. He expected reproaches, some outburst, but no sound came from her. She gazed upon him quite silently, her blue eyes looking black and burning in the deadly white of her face.

Everest loved her so dearly that he could not bear to face the anguish of that gaze. He came a step nearer, then, with his natural easy grace, threw himself on the ground beside her.

“Regina! Darling! It is nothing! Kisses like those are nothing! Do not worry yourself or make yourself ill over them. You know, better than most women, what men are, men of my temperament especially. I don’t want to lie to you, nor to deceive you, but I don’t want you to think things are worse than they are. Speak to me! Say you forgive me, dear one.”

At these words, in the loved voice that ruled all her being, Regina burst suddenly into tears and let him draw her up to him, her tired head, weary with much pondering over the same painful idea, sank against his breast and she continued to sob and sob there.

“There is no question of my forgiving,” she said

at last through her tears. "The whole thing is in your hands. You do want this girl, I suppose; you do desire her?"

Everest laughed a little as he stroked her hair.

"In a way, perhaps, yes, just now. It is difficult for me not to desire any beautiful woman who tells me she loves me. I am not accustomed to resisting them, I'm afraid. The position with Sybil is getting quite impossible. I will end it as soon as I can."

"But what would you like to do about her? For yourself?"

"Do not let us discuss her any more," he responded, kissing her hair. "I want you to trust me and know that the matter between her and me does not and will not in any way affect our relationship. Will you do that?" And what could Regina say or do but assent and let him kiss away her tears.

"Come," he added, after a minute, "let us go out of the grove. It's quite cool now, we can walk easily."

Regina rose at once. It would be a joy to be out with him in the open, away from the hateful camp. Everest called up a servant and told him to pack up carefully and take into the tent Regina's easel and drawing. Then he slipped his arm through hers and they walked through the palms towards the gleaming gold of the desert. The oasis was just like a great temple, she thought, with the straight stems of the trees rising on all sides like pillars to support the roof, and the blue and gold of sand and sky lay beyond its cool green shade, as if beyond an open portal.

The light was full of rose colour, and the whole

desert before them looked palely pink as they emerged from the grove. Each tiny wavelet of the gigantic sea of sand was rose-tinted on its crest and softly mauve in its rounded hollow. The sky was still a glorious sapphire-blue, but transforming slowly into golden orange and across the transparent light of the west winged in joyous flight a band of flamingoes, wonderful in their exquisite salmon-pink and flame-coloured plumage. The calmness, the delight of the evening hour was on all around.

“How lovely this is!” Regina exclaimed. “And I feel so happy whenever I am alone with you. It seems like the enchanted garden days again. Oh, Everest, I am so grieved that this girl has come between us and that you care about her as you do.”

“Who can understand the mystery of our own hearts?” he answered bitterly. “They are just like this desert, full of the bright shining mirage of hope, and the oasis of beauty, and infested with the lions of passion and desire that are always prowling there in the darkness.”

Regina looked up at him as he walked beside her. How well he knew life and spoke of it. Had not his passion for her sprung into her life suddenly as a lion and devoured her, and now perhaps was passing on, leaving her broken and destroyed as the mangled remains of a kid on the sand where a lion has fed. But yet he had led her to those oases and she had drunk deeply there of the sweetest waters of life, and he had shown her the shining mirage and dazzled her eyes with those beautiful phantom images she never could have seen without him. Yes, he was like the desert, and she could not hate him any more than man

can hate the desert, in spite of its cruelty and the death it deals out to them. Deeply, marvellously pink, lower and lower, fell the light, like a mantle dropping on them and the face of the waste. They paused and looked back to the encampment. Palms and tents and the figures of the men and the feeding camels, all looked as if cut out of ruby, all in lustrous glowing red against the pale warm gold background of the sky. They sat down on a rising mound of the rippling sand, and he put his arm round her and drew her close to him till her head found its resting-place on his shoulder, and they were quite silent, fearing that any word should mar the deep hush, the infinite peace that seemed falling like a benediction from that far-arched crystal sky, and over the girl's brain came softly the lines of an old French song she had noted somewhere in her reading:

*“Eloine de ton cœur le fiel qui voudrait s'y glisser.
Ce n'est point dans le cœur de femme que la haine doit s'y fixer.”*

And while she was resolving that never should that bitterness live in her heart for him, no matter what his crimes against her, he was questioning within himself why and how it was that, loving this woman as he did, this curious wild gust of emotion should have swayed him to another. He disliked Sybil, he had always done so. For years she had courted him in vain, and yet and yet, the sight of those lines of her ivory face, whenever he saw them, seemed to throw madness through all his veins. It would tear his heart in two to give up Regina, not for any reason on earth would he have parted with her, but like the deadly thirst that comes on a man after drinking alkali water and

drives him back to drink of the poisonous thing again, his desire held him and lived with him against his will.

The rose light faded and died and twilight came up over the desert like a violet flood. Very slowly and lingeringly they rose and walked back to the tent together, as the fires of the camp were beginning to sparkle amongst the trees.

That same night Regina woke suddenly between the hour of midnight and dawn and sat up in bed with a wild fluttering at her heart. For a moment the bodily faintness, the whole strange series of physical feeling, was so great, she was not conscious of anything else. She turned to Everest for help and then saw she was alone. The bed and tent were alike empty, brilliant with the moonlight that poured through the canvas, bright as day.

Sick, dizzy and confused she sat up, gasping. Then a great joy vibrated suddenly all through her. It was true then. She felt convinced now that her unsubstantial hopes and thoughts were verified. A great delight filled her, the scene of the enchanted garden rushed back upon her and Everest's words. Now she might tell him, she could not be in doubt any longer.

Where was he, she wondered. All the faintness seemed to have passed again as suddenly as it came, all the cloud of bodily sensation to have whirled by. She only felt a great sense of happiness, an eagerness to share it with him.

She rose and found her dressing-gown and a pair of shoes and crossed the tent, all filled with white light, to the door, pulled aside the flap and looked out. It was a very still night, the palms lifted their feathery

tops in stately majesty against the glorious purple of the star-filled sky without a quiver of the lightest leaf, their shadows lay in velvety blackness on the silvered golden of the sand. Not a sound disturbed the deep silence; the air came to her light and pure and cool. Beyond the palm grove, far out into the limitless distance she could see the desert roll like a rippling silver sea beneath the moon rays.

As she stood there something moved, a shadow fell on the sand some fifty yards away from the tent door and then she saw Everest's figure walking slowly as if he were pacing up and down. Beyond him she could see the closed faces of two other tents, they were those of Sybil and her brother. In an instant the scene of the afternoon and its whole import came back to her, and she held suddenly the canvas edge of the door in her cold hand. She looked at the moving figure closely. Up and down, up and down it walked and she could see his hands were clenched sometimes at his sides and sometimes one hand would be raised and drawn across his eyes as if to clear away some painful thought.

Regina turned from the door and found her way back trembling to the bed. She could not tell him now. It was too late. What a bitter irony of fate! What a cruel mockery to send her certainty now, when her lips were closed and he was only thinking of and desiring another! She reached the bed and threw herself upon it in a passion of bitter tears. All their talk, their own dear intimate conversations, came back upon her like knives cutting into her brain. How she had looked forward to the joy it would give him! How she had dreamed of the expression that

would cross his beautiful face! How she had cherished the idea of this pleasure she had in store for him! And now, how could she tell? It would, perhaps, be no pleasure, it would bring to him only a sense of bondage, a feeling that he was bound. Already he was pacing there, tortured by thoughts as pitiless and savage as the desert lions, already he was torn between his honour and his desire. Should she add to his burden? — carry out to him a chain and fetter with which to bind his feet already longing perhaps to go from her? No, a hundred times no; not now. The happy secret, the joyous hope transformed into bitter pain, she would lock up in her own breast as long as she could.

If she could have but told him sooner! If she could have had that delight in London before they left, or on board that magic boat he had fitted up for her! The intense joy of it then! Would it have made any difference, she wondered. No; nothing, she thought, would have helped her.

Everest did not come back, she lay in the silver light of the tent alone, in an agony of grief and pain; her pillow drenched with tears.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE DARK WATCHES

THE camp was in a state of excitement ; the natives in a whirl of breathless jabber, even the stolid Englishman slightly fluttered. Lion had been seen and heard at last — seen with the naked eye and heard by the fleshy ear. It was no question of imagination, nor of rumour, nor of excited fancy this time. It was true, genuine, solid fact. A small party of the native servants had been out reconnoitring some distance from the new camp into which they had just moved, and while returning at sunset, as they came up to the brow of a long low line of rocky hills, a tawny form had been seen swinging along over the gilded ripples of the sandy plain towards them and somewhere far on the left of them had disappeared amongst the rock and scrub.

The reconnoitring band had hurried back to camp, bursting with importance and triumph, and since their arrival with the news the whole party was a-buzz and astir with excitement.

There was a unanimous wish to go out that very night. They had all been tantalised and irritated so long now by lion stories that came to nothing, and wearied by every other kind of shooting than that which they wanted and had come out for, that they all burned with the same enthusiasm to catch the chance

now it had come. The men called upon Everest to come and talk matters over with them in the gun-room tent, away from the women, and he went, leaving Regina cleaning her rifle and looking over her cartridge belt in their sleeping tent. Her eyes had sparkled when she had heard the news. She had no wish to kill a lion for herself, nor acquire as an indifferent hearthrug the beautiful golden coat that fitted him so perfectly, but the joy of going side by side with Everest into danger, and perhaps being of service to him, of even possibly saving his life, seemed to make every nerve and fibre within her glow like hot steel.

“I may come with you, mayn’t I?” she had asked, before he left the tent, “and be close to you through it all, wherever you go, whatever you do?” And he had bent and kissed her.

“My darling, yes, I should think so. You have waited a long time for this. You must come now and show what you can do. You shall have the first shot if you like.”

“Oh no, Everest,” Regina exclaimed. “I want nothing really. I would not for worlds take your shot. I only want to be there so as to aid you or help in any way if it is necessary. Do you see? I don’t want to kill a lion except in self-defence or defence of you.”

“All right,” laughed Everest in return, greatly amused. “You shall come to protect me. Get ready now as I sha’n’t be able to keep these fellows waiting.” And he had gone out.

She busied herself immediately with every detail of her dress, boots and equipment, her pistol, her tiny

flask of brandy, her knife. Nothing was forgotten. Her courage and her blood rose with every instant. There was only one thing she feared, and that was any accident that might happen to Everest which should leave him maimed or disfigured. If he were killed, the matter was simple. She would instantly follow him by means of her pistol. But the thought of his living bereft of the physical beauty and power he now possessed filled her with horror. She would not think of it, however, for she was powerless. She knew Everest wished to go after the lion, and she could not deprive him of a danger and excitement, that he had enjoyed all his life, on account of her foolish—as he would consider them—fears. No, she would face everything with him and hope for the best, that was all she could do. Of herself she never once thought. In addition to her own naturally courageous nature, she had that added indifference to danger which we all feel when our life is unhappy and full of pain. Hers had contained so much slow corroding suffering lately that the thought of risking it in facing some active danger seemed of far less moment than it would have done on board the dahabeeyah on the golden Nile.

Meanwhile Everest had gone round to the gun tent, and the first thing he saw as he entered was Sybil, seated on a camp-stool under the rows of feathered game, surrounded by the three men, who were looking down upon her with various degrees of dismay written on their countenances.

She was white to the lips with terror, trembling and clinging to the sides of the stool with both hands to steady herself. The upshot of her incoherent talk

was that she was too frightened to go with them and too terrified to remain alone in camp. Like most stupid, unimaginative people, she did not realise or picture a danger to herself until it was actually upon her, and when she had heard and spoken of lion-hunting no very definite idea beyond that of the discomforts of camp-life had presented itself to her. Now brought suddenly face to face with the proposition of going out to meet the wild beasts or being shut up alone in the camp, knowing they were in the vicinity, she lost her head completely and seemed beside herself with terror.

Shooting harmless, defenceless things that could not strike back had seemed pleasant and amusing enough to her all this time; when it came to considering the teeth and claws of a lion the whole matter had a different aspect.

Having just left Regina, brilliant and enthusiastic in her courage and devotion, when Everest's eyes fell on the pitiable object his cousin looked, shaking on her camp-stool, a throb of contempt went through him. He was intrepid coolness, courage and dash himself to the very brim, and he could hardly enter at all into the abject cowardice of the girl before him. Directly she saw him she sprang up and ran to him.

"Oh, Everest, *you* will stay in camp with me and protect me, won't *you*?" she exclaimed, and the contrast between the two women's cries struck him at the moment and recurred to him afterwards.

Regina's had been an appeal that she might come into danger to protect him.

"What nonsense is this, Sybil?" he answered impatiently. "We've been waiting all this time for

our chance, and now you make a silly fuss about it! Don't you want to come with us after all?"

"Come with you?" stammered the girl, while her teeth chattered. "No, no, no, I couldn't."

"Well, then, you can stay at home," he returned curtly.

"That's what I've been telling her," interrupted Merton, "and she wants one of us to stay, too. I'll be hanged if I'm going to now after the rotten time we've had so far."

Sybil sank again on her camp-stool. Literally she could not stand up, her knees were knocking together, her limbs crumpling up beneath her. She was cold with fear.

"Well, why can't the two women stay and look after each other?" asked St John, who was standing, his feet apart, his hands deep in the pockets of his Norfolk jacket, staring at the little figure in the centre of the tent. "We'll get on heaps better without them; responsibility, you know, having women about."

"Regina! What good would she be?" answered Sybil.

"Regina would be as good as any of us," returned the doctor rather fiercely. "She's a better shot than any one of us, bar Lanark, and *she's* no fear of anything — *she's* Courage itself."

Sybil was too terrified to heed or care for the obvious comparison.

"You seem rather to forget, gentlemen," remarked Everest coldly, "that this whole camp and expedition was organised by me solely for Regina; and the first shot at lion really belongs to her. Our guests joined us afterwards as — er — an afterthought."

This silenced the guests. St John flung himself down on another camp-stool and began to clean his gun, muttering to himself it was always like this when you had women about. Merton looked as if he could have strangled his sister, the doctor turned to a hanging flamingo and fingered his rosy wing in silence.

"That's quite right, Everest, you're the boss of this show," Merton said, after a second. "You arrange the thing any way you like."

"Why won't *you* stay with me?" pleaded Sybil, looking up at Everest.

"Because I don't choose to," he returned, almost brutally for him, so great was the contrast to his usual voice and manner. "You are making yourself absolutely ridiculous. I will ask Regina to stay with you to take care of you, but if she refuses you'll have to stay alone."

He turned to the others.

"I'll go over and ask her and then come back to you and we can fix up our plans. I think if we could ride out to the ridge to-night in the cool, and be round those water-holes just after dawn, that's about the best we can do."

"Right! Anything you say, Everest," Merton responded, and the others grunted assent.

"Come, Sybil, you'd better go back to the dining tent and wait for me there till I've seen Regina," Everest said peremptorily, and they went out of the tent together.

"Splendid, plucky girl that other, you know," remarked the doctor. "I think it will be a beastly

shame if Lanark makes her stop in camp to look after your precious sister."

"Don't talk to me," growled Merton. "I'm savage enough with her; she wants a good shaking, upsetting things like this."

"Everest, you're angry with me," faltered Sybil, as they got outside. "I can't help being frightened — can — can I?"

"Not altogether, I suppose," returned Everest contemptuously. "But you can help making a fuss about it. You could stay quietly in camp and not bother anybody else if you chose."

"I should have thought you would have liked to stay with me," she murmured plaintively, slipping her tiny hand through his arm. "If they all go, and Regina too, we should be in the camp all night — together — alone — we could — Oh, Everest, do; won't you?"

They were passing under the few palms that intervened between the gun tent and the dining tent. The moon was rising, but not yet very strong. His face was in the shadow and darkness. She could not see it, but she felt him let his arm fall so that her hand had no longer a resting-place, and noticed he moved from her.

"I do not think that Regina would go except with me or for me," he merely answered, but a great wave of passion for the woman he had named rose in him as he thought of that tender, eager, devoted nature longing to face death and danger for his sake.

Sybil felt silenced. She knew she had injured herself in his eyes by her fears, but it was no use her pre-

tending to be brave ; she was white and cold with fear. She did not know what to say. She felt he was angry with her, and she was almost as much afraid of him as she was of his lions.

Everest did not speak again till they reached the dining tent, in which he found her a chair, and then went on to Regina. He felt his whole being ablaze and aflame with love for her. Suddenly he hated himself for his conduct, and a resolve sprang into life that as soon as possible he would break up the present arrangement and go away alone, alone with her. . . . He was at her tent door and entered.

Regina sprang up. "Are we to start now?" she exclaimed joyously. She was quite ready, and looked gloriously handsome and vital and full of mettle, like a racer at the start, as she stood in the centre of the tent, flushed and smiling and animated, awaiting his commands. Everest went straight up to her and without a word caught her to him in one of those mad, passionate embraces she loved from him and never wearied of and never found too violent.

"Dearest, dearest, dearest!" she murmured, kissing him back as soon as he would let her. Whatever he had done, was doing, or desiring, however he had sinned or was sinning against her, he wanted her kiss now and she was powerless to do anything but give it.

He set her free after a moment and stood looking at her.

"Darling, I am so sorry, I have got to ask you something I hate. Will you do it for me?"

Regina's reply was instant.

"Of course, you know you have only to tell me your wishes."

“I am so sorry, so angry, so vexed, you have no idea, but will you stay in camp to-night and give up this expedition?”

Regina’s face suddenly grew white and grave; the joyous flush vanished.

“You yourself going without me?”

“I and the other men, yes.”

Regina fell on her knees before him and stretched out her arms.

“Everest! If you only knew what it means to me, to let you go into danger without me, you would not ask me. If anything should happen to you, I do so want to be with you. Won’t you let me come?”

Her voice, in which her whole ardent nature, her great and overwhelming love for him revealed themselves in wonderful music of tone, made Everest’s eyes suddenly swim and the image of her kneeling at his feet swayed mistily before him. He took both her arms and gently raised her.

“Dear one, listen. I know all you feel and I appreciate it so much, but there is no danger, or very little, for you to worry about. I know you want to share what there is and I want you with me, but in this case you can serve me so much better, if you will, by remaining here. After this we will break up the arrangement and you and I will go and hunt somewhere together alone, where we can do as we please.”

“Why do you want me to stay?” she asked, looking up at him.

The red of angry savage annoyance surged all over his face.

“This girl Sybil has been making a scene and saying she cannot be left alone in camp, and of course,

in a way, we are responsible for her. I can't order any of the others to stay with her, and it's hardly well to leave her by herself, she might do any foolish thing. She is simply in a state of nervous terror. So I am asking you to stay and look after her."

Regina paled with resentment. She did not know how utterly and entirely Everest revolted now from the girl whose physical beauty had for a time so ensnared and delighted his senses. She did not know how strongly he was drawn to herself and how completely the whole influence of the other had faded from his body and his mind. She had no clue as to the gradual weakening of this influence for some time past and the growing indifference on Everest's part which now had suddenly changed into contempt and revolt. He had been very silent about Sybil, after the manner of men, and had tried to show Regina by acts rather than in words that the matter, as far as he was concerned, was at an end. But as he stood to Sybil as host, and as she put out all her powers to keep him by her side, it was difficult for Regina to gain a just idea of the truth. Had Everest been of a more brutal and less refined type of sensualist he could have explained to Regina in a few short, outspoken sentences the fact that all and more than he wanted had been pressed upon him, and that he was now weary and annoyed with the girl and everything connected with her. But he revolted from any betrayal of a woman who, however selfishly, had loved him. He felt it a matter of honour to be absolutely silent about her. And in this way Regina had to be left to misunderstand and to suffer.

So now that he appealed to her to stay in camp it

only seemed to her that she was appointed as guardian to the jewel he wished kept in safety, and her happiness, desire and pleasure was to be again sacrificed to this girl as it had been now for so long.

She was so bitterly angry ; the rage and tumult of her jealous passion and indignation was such within her, that she could have turned upon Everest then and poured out a flood of burning reproach like a torrent of molten metal upon him.

But her self-control was perfect, her empire over self complete. She knew, with a man like this, violence, coercion was useless. And that moment of all others was not the one for recrimination or reproach.

She was white to the lips as she looked at him, but she said simply :

“ I am to give up coming with you in order to take care of Sybil. Is that it ? ”

“ That is the letter of it, the spirit is that you stay behind in camp because *I* have wished you to do so.”

Unconsciously his tone was cold and commanding. He felt the intense vibration of resentment and indignation that went through her as plainly as if an assagai was shaken before his face, and he was enraged at the whole situation. For a second they both looked at each other in silence, and, as so often before, the girl felt that, if he chose, he had every right to command. To a man of inferior physical aspect, to one who had less influence on her senses, she could not in that moment of intense disappointment, of revolt and outraged feeling, have submitted. As it was, after that moment of silent rebellion, she laid down her rifle and turned away.

"There is no more to be said then: I will stay," she answered, in a low tone.

Everest's face softened. He followed her and put his arm round her neck.

"Dear little girl, you think me a brute, don't you? I will give up the expedition myself and stay with you. Do you wish me to do that?"

Regina looked up at him, her eyes were full of hot blinding tears.

"I shall be in an agony of suspense till you come back safely," she returned; "but I can't ask you to stay, I know how you would hate it — the other men thinking you perhaps wanted to get out of it and all that, or else that you had no will of your own and I had made you stay. As host and leader you can't well stay behind — you would feel it so."

The male nature in Regina made it easy for her to understand how hateful, nearly impossible, it would have been for Everest to stay in camp with the women while the rest of the party went out to the excitement of the hunt. The intense disappointment she suffered herself in foregoing this, the first really important, expedition with him, for which she had trained herself so patiently, made it easy to realise what his would be in missing the first opportunity for which they had all waited so long.

She turned and kissed his hand on her shoulder.

"Go, my dearest, as you wish; only come back to me safely."

When Everest left her and went back to the impatient men in the tent, his whole heart and soul seemed on fire with passion for her. He just looked into the

dining tent as he passed, where Sybil was sitting quivering and pallid in her chair.

“ You have got your way,” he said curtly. “ Regina has given up her own wishes to stay and look after you, but if this sort of thing is going to continue, the sooner you go home, I should think, the better. It is simple nonsense to join a hunt and then try and spoil the sport.”

He felt so angry with her, she had spoiled the whole thing and prevented his having Regina with him, which he had really looked forward to. Above all, he was repelled by her weakness and cowardice. His passion leapt up for a woman who was courageous and fearless. There was something in himself that responded instantly to any heroic act or quality, and for the weak and timid he had nothing but a sense of aversion. Sybil was too cowed and too wretched altogether to reply. She could not find her voice and Everest went on his way to the gun tent.

“ Hurray!” they shouted, as they saw him. “ We thought you were never coming back. Well, what’s the news?”

“ Regina will stay,” Everest answered quietly.

“ She *is* a brick. *You* ought to have stayed, Merton, and let her come with us.”

Merton only grinned and went on counting his cartridges.

Regina, left alone in her tent, sat down and pressed both her clasped hands on her knees. She was thinking of her love for Everest and how absolutely it made her his slave. She recalled the image of him as he had stood there a few seconds back, practically

commanding her to stay in the camp, and realised how impossible it was for her to rebel against him as it would be impossible for her to refuse or deny him anything, as in fact it had always been from the first. And she was inclined to resent this taking away of her will-power and this feeling that it was beneath another's feet, but she was foolish to do so, for in the heart of worship of another is found the extreme of passionate pleasure. Above all she was fortunate, and this she did really feel grateful for, that the empire over her was in such hands as his. Everest was not a commonplace nor an ordinary individual. She had not that intensely painful humiliation of being conquered by an inferior. All her sense of wounded self-love and pride was tempered by her intense admiration of him; physically and mentally in every way he was worthy to command others and exact their obedience. Passion, the slave-driver, had at least made her over to a noble owner.

Immoral he might be called, but she would not say so, it did not seem to her the right word. She knew that almost nowhere, neither in the pages of history nor in the world, are there men to be found of great physical strength and energy combined with powerful mental equipment who have joined to them a rigid morality. That a vigorous and active male animal shall acquire all the unattached females in his vicinity is one of Nature's most general and fundamental laws, and Regina knew it, and that is why she had resisted and resented, as far as she had been able, the vicinity of camp-life that threw Sybil into constant contact with him.

And though he made her suffer frightfully for his

own gratification, she did not blame him so blindly as another woman might have done, because she realised it was Nature's fault more than his—Nature who will not give that gift of intense vitality to a man without its accompanying dangers.

That vitality Regina loved and desired for her child. How she longed now to tell him he was the father of the little life that was forming within her! It was such a supreme happiness to her to know that she was bearing his child, something that would be perhaps the beautiful tiny image of himself. It would be a delight intensified if he knew it too. Perhaps, if she delayed, the pleasure of ever saying those happy words would be denied to her. Perhaps this very night he would be taken away from her, and then he would not ever have known that which once at least he had told her he desired so much.

She sprang to her feet, it was such a temptation to speak, to tell him, before he left this evening! But out of pure unselfishness she hesitated. If in reality he wished now after all to abandon her, to put his cousin in her place, she must, must, must leave him, as ever, free to do so, though it killed her.

He might already consider himself in honour bound to marry her, of that she could not be quite sure, but she was certain that he would feel bound if she told him she was to be the mother of his child.

No, she would wait still and be silent. Fate would perhaps reveal to her in some way, soon, the truth of things and how she ought to act.

She dismissed personal thought from her mind and began to gather some things together to take over to Sybil's tent. For, from the first, she had strenuously

opposed the girl entering hers. This was the sanctuary of her and Everest's love. She would not have anyone to intrude there. The whole of the camp was public. She wanted one place at least where she could be secure of privacy. She had made a great point of this with Everest, and he had given absolute and stringent orders that neither Sybil nor anyone else was to disturb Mrs. Lanark in her tent. And Regina was grateful. She felt she could not tolerate the hateful presence of Sybil there. Everest was wonderfully good in matters like that, where so many men fail. If Regina expressed a wish, however little of importance it might seem to him, he exerted himself to have it carried out. He never pooh-poohed or waved away her request. If she wished it, that was sufficient. That same obedience he expected from her, he exacted from everybody else to the orders he gave for her sake. Regina was very grateful to him for this. It gave her a position in the camp that was very pleasant, and she knew intuitively that it was a rare quality in men. The small daily wishes of wives are generally, as in her father's case, politely but steadily ignored.

She cleared up the tent, and it was from Sybil's door, some two hours later, that both the girls saw the hunting party start, a small procession of camels, headed by the native guides, scouts and servants with all the necessary guns, ammunition, knives, flasks, water-bottles, flash-lamps, food-baskets, and all the rest of the necessaries for luxurious hunting.

Everest, having the arranging and planning of everything, mounted and started last and had moved a few paces already from the camp, the others being

a little on ahead, when he paused and, drawing up the camel, told it to kneel down again, which it immediately did, for the tone of his caressing voice had the effect of reducing every camel he mounted to docility.

He never carried a whip or a goad, nor had the rein fastened in the nostril of the camel, relying entirely on his voice and magnetic influence over them to guide them. Nor had he ever struck an animal in his life. He used to say: "A man must be a fool if he can't manage an animal by his intellect," and it was a fact that they never disobeyed him.

Now Regina, watching him from the tent door, with tear-filled eyes, admired the easy skill with which he handled his camel and dismounted. She thought he had forgotten something and went forward to him. But Everest had only turned back for her. He clasped her to him and kissed her.

"My dear, good little empress," he whispered in her ear, as he bent over her, and Regina felt that he was pleased with her and her own heart grew hot with delight. She threw her arms round him with passionate fervour.

"My emperor! You know I would die for you," she murmured back.

Another moment and he had swung himself on to the saddle-cloth and the camel rose, to recommence its stately march. The moon was now high, and its light, clear and silver, flooded all the plain and illumined the string of moving objects. One of the men looked back and saw the incident.

"What's up?" asked St. John, who was close beside him. "Anything gone wrong?"

"Oh no, it's only Everest spooning as usual."

"Which one is it this time?" asked the doctor grimly, looking straight ahead of him.

"His wife, as it happens."

There was silence for a moment and then Graham said:

"But he's an awfully nice fellow. I don't wonder at the women all running after him, I should be in love with him myself if I were one. He's a marvellous person really. I don't believe he's ever lost his temper in his life, he's such tremendous command of himself. Animals are just as crazy about him as women. I saw him managing a horse, a vicious brute that no one else could get near. Everest was riding it and it began its tricks, it did everything to make a man in a rage, but Everest never turned a hair. He kept his seat just as if he'd been in an arm-chair, and talked to the animal the whole time and, by Jove! the horse seemed to understand him, he settled down and was as quiet and good as anything. Everest had never touched him once, except to stroke his neck; he'd no whip, no spurs, nothing. I expect that's how he manages his women, makes them do all he wants without a disagreeable word."

"Easy enough," mumbled the doctor, "when a man's so beastly good-looking."

Everest had just caught up with them, so they lapsed into silence, and the camels all sidled together and swung forward steadily into the silver silence of the desert night.

Regina, left behind, stood watching them diminish and diminish into distance with the blood racing madly in her veins and all her brain alight with anger. She did so long and yearn to be there, up beside him

on the saddle-blanket, on the camel, swinging, swaying out into wide space, beneath that glorious, star-filled, infinitely arching sky. She loved being with him anywhere, and most of all riding, and on a camel.

The free, giant motion of the animal, the sense of strength and ease with which its great stride goes forward, bearing its burden high above the dust and impediments of the earth, sets the blood glowing and the pulses dancing, and she loved it. Here and now to part with him, to see him going to adventure, danger, risk she might not share, to be condemned to the hot, silent tent, to sit inactive there when all her eager, ardent frame was calling out for deeds, movement, action, hurt cruelly. Her brain was seething in fury and rebellion as she turned her steps slowly back to Sybil's tent.

"Come in and shut the door, do," came the latter's voice from within, peevish with fear. "I feel so frightened. I think they were brutes to go and leave us alone."

"I can't see what there is to be afraid of," returned Regina coldly, entering and letting down the tent flap.

Of another nature altogether, she had no fear of solitude, nor of the desert. She would have lain down anywhere on the sand, her hand on her rifle, her pistol in her belt, and slept like an English child in its cot at home.

"They are rather brutes, but they can't help it," she added absently, and sat down on a folding camp-stool, watching the other girl begin to undress.

The tent interior looked cosy enough, bright with red rugs on its sandy floor and a gilt-framed mirror

swinging between the two narrow beds—for a second one had been put in for herself, as Sybil could not bear to be alone if Graham was no longer in the tent beside her.

“What are you afraid of specially?”

“Why, all these lions about!”

Regina laughed contemptuously.

“All these lions about! You talk as if we had been falling over lions and unable to get into our tent door for them!” she exclaimed. “As a fact, we’ve been here nearly two months and not seen one!”

“Yes; but that was in another camp. I do believe we’ve got into the districts now where they are. Regina,” she added suddenly, “what does ‘Hina’ in Arabic mean?”

“‘Hina’ means ‘here.’”

“I thought so; and ‘henak,’ what does that mean?”

“‘Henak’ means ‘there,’ ‘over there,’ ‘at a distance.’”

“Well, that’s just what I thought. Now I’ll tell you what I heard those servants saying. They were talking about lions, because I know that word, and then one said: ‘La, la mush henak, lekin hina, hina.’ Now doesn’t that mean: ‘No, no, it’s not over there but here, here’? And he got quite excited, and pointed just round the camp.”

Regina looked grave.

“Why did you not tell the men?” she asked.

“I *did*, I kept telling them about it, but nobody would listen to me. Merton did ask the man something about it, but the others all swore the lions were over the ridge. You know how they jabber and how

they contradict themselves and each other. My idea is, these horrid beasts are all round us," and she shivered. The light from the centre lamp fell on the fair, flower-like beauty of the girl, and as she let down the gold river of her hair the blood of her companion watching her seemed to turn into flame. She felt she would like to spring upon her and kill her, like the lions she was talking about.

"Well, if it's true, I am rather glad," she returned. "I'd much rather they would come and eat us up than Everest."

"Regina! How can you! You don't mean it!"

"Of course I mean it," she flashed out, with extreme passion in her tones, "to be here and know he is in danger, that's the worst agony I can have. I would give up my life for him any time."

"How wonderful!" returned Sybil, drawing off her shoes. "I couldn't care for a man like that."

"No, I don't suppose you could."

"Good-night, I shall try to go off to sleep and forget I am in this horrible place. How you stare, Regina! What's the matter? Won't you go to bed?"

"No; I shall sit up for a time. Go to sleep in peace. You are quite safe."

Sybil lay down on her bed, only drawing the rug partly over her. She had a loose thin flannel gown fastened round her waist and open a little at her neck in the hot night. It was very still within the tent, and without there was not a sound as the moonlit hours went by.

Regina sat like a statue, her elbow on her knee, her chin on her hand, watching the sleeping girl.

What mad, passionate thoughts came to her in their dark battalions and assailed her!

How beautiful it was, that delicate, ivory face, so exquisitely carved, as it lay against the white canvas pillow. It was no wonder that a man should covet it for his own, especially a man like Everest, with his artistic eye for perfect lines. He had always admired it enough to make him keep with him everywhere the blue velvet portrait-case he had had in his rooms at the Rectory. His sister had said that but for Regina he would have married her. But it was not true — Regina felt it was not true, that she never could have satisfied him — kept him — but yet, perhaps, beauty and name and breeding in his wife would have been enough, and for the rest, of all that is divine in humanity — passion and love and character — he would have sought in other women . . . she did not know, her thoughts could only whirl round in dizzy, empty circles, outside the barrier of his implacable silence, as falling leaves might beat and whirl round a fortress wall. She knew nothing, and in the obscurity of another's feelings and passions there is no firm ground to stand on.

“It is not his fault, nor hers,” she thought; “but oh! Fate! take her away from here, leave him to me again.”

In the silence stirred a tiny sound, she heard it, and then, instantly, quicker than thought itself, the tent flap moved and a long yellow streak flashed by her and was upon the bed before her eyes.

One frightful shriek rang out, then the yellow flash passed by and was gone into the night, and the bed was empty where the golden beauty of the girl had

been. Regina had sprung to her feet, but the lion had apparently not even seen her.

Almost like lightning, with a rapidity that no one can believe until he has seen it, the great beast had entered, seized its prey and gone.

For a second, Regina stood motionless. The blinding realisation came upon her that she stood alone in the tent and that her rival was gone from her to a certain death. Her invocation had been heard.

In that moment a view of her future came to her. She would be his, alone with him again, safe, secure, protected, loved, herself and her child. And all that was required of her was to do nothing. No one could blame her. Fate had come to her aid. Why should she not receive back her life and happiness at its hands?

The temptation came upon her and gripped her for a moment so that she could not move.

Then she picked up her rifle, jammed her pistol more firmly in her belt and went to the flap of the tent door and pushed it aside.

In the bright African moonlight she saw the form of the great yellow cat, trotting leisurely across the sand in the direction of a low ridge of sandhill, scrub and rock that lay towards the east, obliquely opposite to the direction in which the men had gone. The moonlight showed her clearly its victim flung over its shoulder for its convenience in long travel. She could see, too, it was a lioness, and these two facts made her think that the girl was probably uninjured. The lioness was out hunting, not for herself but for food for her cubs, and the prey was being carefully carried back to them. She could see there was no

struggle. No screams broke the stillness. In helpless unconsciousness the girl was being borne away to a swift, inexorable death. And to the watcher at the tent door came again the great voice of Self and all the cries of the Flesh saying: "Let her go! It is not your part to save her."

She did not know how many servants had gone with the men; doubtless they had left some, but those probably not the most active nor the best shots. If she took the time to go to the back of the camp and find and rouse them, before anything could really be done in rescue the lioness would have disappeared. The natives would talk and gesticulate, weapons would probably not be ready, the time in which rescue could be effected would be lost. Yet Regina would appear to have done all she could, she would have roused the camp, she would have tried to get assistance; no one could expect a woman to go out on foot alone to face lions in the night, nor reproach her if she did not.

Regina would be guiltless and Sybil for ever unable to mar her life again.

But as there is a magnetic pole which draws all magnets to itself, so in this world there is that great indefinable Force of the Right which draws all noble natures always to itself. Where they see the Good and the Right gleaming ahead of them, there they must follow, though stones cut their feet and thorns tear their flesh. The Right, through everything, pulls them to itself. And it drew Regina's feet swiftly over the threshold of the tent now. Silently, quickly, gripping her rifle, she followed in the wake of the lioness. And Temptation walked beside her,

trying vainly to suffocate her soul with its dark wings. She knew that in the effort before her she must probably surrender her own life, and the greatness of the sacrifice, the immensity of the demand made upon her appealed to her, called upon the heroism within her.

For some miles the lioness went on at the same easy trot, and Regina followed swiftly, but unable to shorten the distance between them. Then the yellow form began to spring and bound, and for a second now and then was lost to view, and her pursuer knew that she had reached the scrub by the rocks. Then the tawny form disappeared altogether and only the human figure remained, hurrying over the sand in the moonlight.

At last she reached the scrub amongst the rising sandhills and here she went very cautiously, searching for the mouth of the lair she guessed was hidden there. She stood still for a moment, listening for a sound to guide her. A faint scuffling noise came from a gully beside her, deep down between two black faces of rock and overgrown with stunted thorn and the disk-leaved cactus. Down, down through these, one step at a time, silently, holding her heavy rifle above her head to avoid the catching thorn, she descended. The moon, that had been obscured by a tiny cloud, broke suddenly again into full brilliance and she saw she was at the mouth of the cave.

Calm, cool, without a thought of her own life and beauty that she was taking to destruction, only filled with an intense determination to save another, she stooped down and entered the lair. The entrance was low, but worn smooth and easy of access, once

reached, by the passing and repassing of a great body. Within the cave the floor was sandy, and the rock roof so near to it she could not stand upright, but had to move forward crouchingly, with bent knees. Through the obscurity of the inside she strained her eyes, and there, opposite her, far back from the entrance, she saw four green spots of phosphorescent fire against the rock background. She paused, holding herself very still. The warm, suffocating scent of the den filled her nostrils; she heard snuffing and scrambling noises, and then, as the darkness became more and more clear to her eyes, she despaired the forms of two little yellow cubs tumbling over each other on some brush in the corner and snuffing at her with curiosity. The mother was not there. Regina looked round. On a ledge of rock jutting out from one side lay the unconscious form of her companion, her loose sleeping gown all gathered together by her neck, where the lioness had held her, but apparently otherwise untouched.

Regina's heart leaped up in a great sense of triumph. All personal feeling was lost and she was only intent now on her heroic duty to save.

As she had thought, the lioness had been out hunting, not for immediate food, but for the sake of filling up her larder, and having secured one victim, dissatisfied, perhaps, with the size of it, she had left it there and started out again to look for more.

Speed was the great necessity now! Regina felt that if she could get away from the den and cross the desert to the camp in time, her success was won. She turned to the rock and lifted the girl's limp body into her arms. One of the cubs ran out and snuffed

and growled at her like a puppy and she nearly fell over its soft body as it waddled to the entrance with her. But in a moment more she stood upright outside and drew in a deep breath of the pure desert air.

Up, up through the brake and the tangle of tearing thorn and poisonous cactus, she ascended, panting with the burden of the girl and the rifle in her arms. She held her against her breast, one arm under her shoulders, the other under her knees, and the rifle clasped flat along the girl's side in her right hand. How she blessed her splendid strength of limb and lung and muscle coming up that thorny, rocky path. The top of the sandhills gained, the worst was over, smooth and easy to travel lay before her the hard sand of the desert. Down from the sandhills in safety she stood now on the level and, breathing deeply, she started a steady, even walk over the moonlight plain. Her burden lay so still in her arms she feared the shock had killed her. But the body felt limp and warm; she could only hope she was merely unconscious. She walked on and the sweat in the hot night broke from her forehead and poured down her face, her knees trembled from fatigue. From behind a faint light of the coming dawn began to shine on the desert. Still very far in the distance she thought her strained eyes could distinguish the white peaks of their camp. Would the men have returned? Would he be there? How would —— Without her having heard a sound, there was a rush of wind past her, a blow on her neck and shoulders of something she could not see and the next instant she was flat on the sand, the

body of the girl beside her, over which stood the lioness, growling and snuffing suspiciously. Confused by the scent of the den and the cubs, the animal paused there.

Regina scrambled to her knees, raised her rifle, took aim and fired, over the body of the girl, straight at the snowy breast of the lioness. There was a roar of agony and rage and the beast was upon her. Her bullet had found its heart, but it still had strength and time to take its vengeance. Without pain, for the girl was above the region of pain in that excitement that knows neither suffering nor fear, she felt its teeth close cruelly on her shoulder and break it, and its claws sink deep into her breast and back and tear the flesh. She turned her head away, cheek down to the sand, to save her sight, for she still had work to do, and so for a second remained motionless. The great beast's growling turned to long moans, slowly its teeth and claws relaxed. Then suddenly it rolled clear from her and lay still.

Regina picked herself up and stood, the blood pouring from her shoulder and chest, but the dauntless soul, strong and unbroken, determined to conquer.

With her left and uninjured arm she drew the girl's body up to her and walked forward, strong in that last great gush of vitality that Nature gives, opening all those reserves for which there is no future need.

Half-an-hour later, as the dawn came up over the ridge, she reached the camp.

Her eyes were dim, and vaguely she saw the press of figures, the fires, the standing camels. Her head

was light and a strange singing filled her ears, but she heard the word "Regina" come in his voice to her, full of agony and love and passion, and she staggered towards him, livid, speechless, her clothing drenched with blood that still came slowly from her shoulder.

It seemed to her swaying vision that she was instantly surrounded by figures and faces, a thousand faces swam round her, her burden was taken from her, then came the roughness of sand to her cheek and lips as she fell, and then black unconsciousness.

The doctor and Everest knelt beside her; at his orders all the others fell back and the cool breeze that blows in the desert at dawn came to her unimpeded. With hands that did not show the slightest quiver, though the tension of agony in his brain was so great, it seemed as if it must break it, Everest loosened her cartridge belt and drew it from her.

"Good God! her right arm!" He exclaimed, as it fell unnaturally, broken, as he moved her and suddenly the words shot across his brain in its anguish, "if some love business does not cripple her."

The doctor forced a little brandy between her white lips, but she did not move, she lay there under Everest's eyes, the gay, radiant creature he had left, now crushed and senseless, a little heap of torn flesh and broken bones and blood-stained clothing.

It seemed to him that all the agony of a hundred lives of pain was forced into his brain at that sight.

"We must get this off," the doctor muttered, indicating the black and stiffening blouse; it was already torn down by the lioness's claws at the back,

and the under-linen bodice and flesh and skin with it. St John and Merton, who were standing by, turned away, unable to bear the sight of all that white loveliness mangled and destroyed. Everest, pale as ashes, but perfectly calm, drew and cut away the stuff, piece by piece, with infinite skill and care.

No one seemed to think of Sybil; after the first hasty pronouncement of the doctor that she was alive and uninjured, she had been carried to her tent. Merton had given some orders about her, then he had come back to Everest's side, but Regina herself, as sense struggled back to her, asked as she first unclosed her eyes:

“Is she all right? Did I save her?”

“Yes, my sweet, my brave darling, you did,” Everest answered, bending over her. Their eyes met, and a little smile played in hers as she saw the fire of love in his.

“I’m glad,” she said faintly. The agony was intense now that action was over. Her eyelids quivered and then grew still as she lapsed into senselessness again.

Merton, who was watching her face, turned to St John and gripped his arm.

“Oh, St John, this is too horrible. If she dies what shall I do? Why did I leave Sybil with her?” His face was working convulsively. St John drew him away.

The sun was getting quite hot, in that instant way it has in Africa; as soon as its rays are well over the horizon they begin to burn.

The doctor wanted to get her into the shelter of the tent. As he touched her to raise her she groaned.

"Let Everest lift me," she murmured, and the doctor drew back.

"She can stand it better from you," he said to Everest, and the latter slipped his arm very gently under her and raised her. It was agony to be touched, frightful pain to be moved, but she was silent in his arms as he lifted her and carried her into their tent.

He laid her on the bed, on her unwounded side, and put a pillow to support the broken, useless arm, and then bent and kissed her as, in all their days of passion, he had not done yet. She saw in the anguish on his face at that moment his suffering, that he showed in no other way.

"Do not grieve so," she whispered. "I am so strong. I shall recover all right. Tell me, did you find any lion?"

He shook his head. "No, not where we went. That's why we came back. They were on this side."

"Then I did have the first shot at lion in this camp, as you said I ought to. How strange it all seems! I shot it out there to the east of the camp. I want you to have that skin. Will you send after it? Get it before it is spoiled, and always keep it. Everest, you know—I saved her—for you."

"I know, I know," he answered, and his voice told her the words were wrung out of his inmost soul. "But I only want you. It has all been a mistake, and I felt I could not explain. You are my very life, dearest, no one else is anything."

"Come, come, this won't do!" broke in upon them from the door. "No talking, no excitement, please."

The doctor had gone for his case of probes and

dressings. He stood now with it in his hand and disapproval on his face. Everest moved a little from the bed.

"Leave me with the doctor for a moment," Regina said. "I want to ask him something," and Everest left the tent to give orders for the body of the lioness to be brought into camp.

As he came back from doing this, he came upon the doctor just leaving the tent and stopped.

"Will she live?" he asked, and the doctor thought in all his experience he had never seen so much suffering and anxiety on a person's face, combined with such perfect self-control and calm, and thought what a splendid pair they were.

"No one can say," he replied, "but I should think there is every chance of her doing so. I was just coming out to find you. This probing of the wounds is a most painful process, but it's extremely necessary; all our success depends on getting them clean. They are all choked up now with clotted blood and bits of linen driven in by the beast's claws. Your wife's just as brave as she can be, but she must suffer intensely. Your influence is so good over her, you'd better be present while I'm doing it: you soothe her, mesmerise her in some way, and that's better than an anæsthetic. I believe she'd let you mince her up alive and never complain. It's a nasty business for you seeing it done, but if you can stand it, it's better for her."

"Of course I will," rejoined Everest. "I was coming back now to her," and both men entered the tent together.

It was a hideous scene of four long hours of suffer-

ing that followed, but suffering illumined by those noblest qualities in humanity that shine out like lamps here and there and throw their light across the stained pages of humanity's black record as a whole.

The girl never flinched nor groaned as the probes went deep into the long slashes from shoulder to waist made by the lion's claws, nor when the forced-in linen was drawn out from the wound above her breast, nor when her broken arm was handled and set. Of all the great horrible pain she was suffering the men were given no sign to increase their difficulty and labour.

Everest at first held her hand and spoke to her, putting to her lips from time to time the liquid the doctor ordered, but when the wounds were clean it was his strong, slight hand that, without a quiver of the muscles, replaced as far as was possible the torn fragments of flesh and strips of skin exactly and perfectly in their place in the hope that they would grow again, reunite and join without a serious scar. The union of brain between these two was so complete that, though Regina had not uttered any word on the subject, to Everest it seemed as if her whole body, as it lay there so broken and wounded, was crying out to him: "My beauty, my beauty! Save that if you can for the sake of our love." And the doctor watched with surprise the admirable skill and infinite care with which he pieced all the satin surface together. Some of the places were too deep to be treated in any way but stitched up, and this the doctor did himself. Then they dressed and bandaged the whole of the back and shoulder and breast and set

and bandaged the broken arm, and only at the very last Regina quietly fainted as Everest kissed her and told her it was finished.

When she recovered consciousness she passed almost immediately into a deep sleep. She was so very, very tired and everything was done now, and he was pleased with her, so nothing mattered and the sense of suffocating heat in the tent as the noon rays poured down on the canvas, the buzz of the flies, the sight of the instruments and basins and bandages, the long ache and smart of her whole body, all these were blotted out as the soft, velvet darkness of sleep enfolded her.

The doctor turned to Everest.

"Now you must turn in and take a rest. Out riding all last night and then four hours of this. Tell them to send in that extra little bed here and then get a good sleep. If you don't you'll be done up and no good to nurse her."

"But it's the same for you, doctor," rejoined Everest, smiling. He was standing erect at the foot of the bed, without any sign of fatigue. "You've been without sleep as long as I have; you want a rest."

"Oh, nonsense. I'm not leading the life you are and taking it out of myself all ways at once. I'll get that bed in and then off to sleep you go. When you wake up you can watch her and let me doze a bit." And he went out.

A little later, when he had seen his two patients, as he called them to himself — for the pallor and extreme mental distress of Everest's face told him that, unless there were some alleviation of the strain, physical collapse must follow — asleep in the big tent,

he crossed the strip of fiery sand to the two little white ones opposite of Sybil and her brother. He entered the girl's and found her white and shivering in her bed with the rug drawn up to her neck. Merton was standing beside her.

"Why doesn't Everest come to see me?" Sybil asked directly the doctor appeared. "It was all so awful for me. He might have come."

"Mr. Lanark has not had a moment in which to think of anything but his wife and her suffering; he's been working with me there for her these last four hours, and now I've made him go to bed. He's utterly exhausted with it all," the doctor answered, with some asperity.

"I don't believe I shall ever get over it," moaned Sybil, "that awful beast coming on to the bed. I think it's coming again every minute."

"You had better try and brace up, and not give way to your nerves like this," he returned. "Your friend shot the lioness, so you've nothing to fear from the same one anyway. You'd better get up and have some luncheon with the rest of us. There's nothing on earth the matter with you."

"Oh, doctor, how can you! You don't know what I feel! I couldn't eat! I want to see Everest. I am sure he would come if he were told." And her eyes began to fill with tears.

"I'll go and get him, Sybil; don't cry," exclaimed Merton, who resented a little the doctor's attitude to his sister. He approached the door, but the doctor barred his progress.

"You shall not go," he exclaimed angrily, "and disturb him now. I won't be responsible for his life,

I tell you, if you drag him up from his sleep and bully him. Let your sister wait till the evening. If she has the smallest consideration for him she will do that at least."

The doctor was a great burly man and Merton could not get by him. He stopped sulkily and Sybil said:

"Don't go, Merton, I'll wait."

"I should think you would," grunted the doctor, "when you've caused all this trouble already!"

The contrasts of humanity, he was thinking—Regina in her agonies had declared they were not to worry about her, she was not suffering, she would soon recover. This girl, untouched, persisted in lying in bed and magnifying her little woes.

Regina's first inquiry had been for Sybil. Sybil never troubled herself once to ask about the one who had rescued her!

"Well, if you won't get up and lunch," he said aloud, "you'd best have a sleeping draught and try to go to sleep."

But Sybil did not want to be put to sleep, she wanted to lie and shiver and look ill and complain and talk about herself. So the doctor put the draught back in his pocket and went off to the dining tent, where he found St John, and the two men sat down to luncheon alone.

CHAPTER X

THE REACTION

THAT same evening, late, when the moon was pouring silver over the encampment and over the level plain, and the pink and orange ridges of rocky hills that lay to the west and east, and the air was cool and still, Everest and Sybil sat in the latter's tent, of which the flap was securely shut and tied. They were alone. The girl was dressed now, and sitting on a folding-chair. She looked pale, and her face was tense with anxiety, her eyes distracted.

Everest sat opposite her, restored by his long sleep, calm and entirely composed. On his face was an unusual expression of severity: it looked implacable, absolutely immovable, like a countenance of stone. Sybil clasped her hands and wrung them together in her lap.

“Oh, Everest, don't say such things,” she said, in a low tone. “Don't say you won't marry me — any time. Not just now, I know you can't — not for some time, perhaps, but promise you will some time — when we are back in Europe, say. It is so dreadful to me to think of — of — all that has happened, if we are not to marry after all.”

“Why did you seek such a position, then?” he asked, looking across at her steadily; and she, meeting the gaze of those large eyes full of fiery darkness like the African sky at midnight, felt her soul sink

and faint in a mingled anguish of shame and despair and hopeless longing for him.

"You knew that I was with a woman I loved, and who loved me. Why did you come and try to force yourself, as you did from the first, between us?"

"I felt sure you were not married. Regina was only one of all the many women you have had with you for a time. She would have to give way to any woman you wanted to marry."

Everest's face grew still more set and cold, if that were possible.

"You see you chose to assume all that, and assumed wrongly," he said quietly, and his tones were like falling ice. "Had you accepted the idea that we were married you would have been wiser. Regina is virtually my wife. I should never place any other woman than her in that position. I shall be glad if you will try to grasp that now."

Sybil, unable to bear his gaze, his voice, beside herself with wretchedness, burst into tears.

She slipped from her chair to the floor and put her hands pleadingly on his knees.

"You can't mean it, Everest, I am sure you don't. It would be the wrecking of my life."

Everest's face did not change; he looked down upon her unmoved. She was very beautiful, but in that moment he did not even admire her. The passion for Regina, stirred now into a great blaze, seemed literally to hide this girl from him; moreover, she had deceived, entrapped and was now trying to coerce him.

"Do you not see that if I did marry you it would mean the wrecking of Regina's life?"

"I have not to think or care about Regina!"

"Did she not think of you when she followed you into the lion's cave? You would not be living at all now but for her. For you she is lying there in agony, maimed and mutilated, that you may be here safe, and you talk of not having to think of her!" His voice shook with anger.

"Rubbish! She didn't do it for me, she did it for you."

This was perfectly true, but it was the worst thing she could have said in her own cause. It came over Everest with heartrending force, the truth of it. Regina had done it for him. For him she was now lying crushed and broken, with all her glorious vitality laid by perhaps for ever.

"For me, well, then, yes, for me; and you want me to desert her in return, to consider you before her. You talk of my duty to you when she has all but given up her life for me! I have no duty whatever to anyone, except to her!"

"Nonsense, Everest; you know it's no use to talk like that. You must marry me now after what has occurred. You knew very well I considered myself engaged to you or I should never have allowed it."

"Allowed!"

Everest only uttered that one word. His face was very pale; his lips compressed into one hard line; his brows contracted. Vividly the whole scheme of the last two months stood before him; like a raised map in black and white relief. The coming of this girl and her brother to join their expedition, their insistence on being in the same camp with him, the daily, hourly companionship she had forced upon him,

the persistent court, the final deliberately compromising situations, the seduction of his senses, the difficult overthrow of his reason.

As in *Regina's* case he had taken all blame to himself, and knew that he had abused her innocence and trusting love, so here his conscience absolutely acquitted him.

Just then the string of the door flap was pulled undone from the outside, the flap pushed aside and Merton came in. It seemed to *Everest* as if his coming had been arranged beforehand. *Sybil* rose and sat back in her chair. *Everest* did not move. Merton looked from one to the other.

"I can guess what you've been discussing," he said rather awkwardly. "Look here, *Everest*. *Sybil* has told me everything, and I really do think you ought to do something about it."

"What would you propose my doing?" returned *Everest* coldly, looking steadily at Merton, who flushed uncomfortably under the older man's gaze.

"Well, marry her, or promise to marry her when we all meet again in Europe, because I suppose we'll have to break up now. She's had such a shock she wants to get out of this, and I imagine you'll be tied here some time yet; but I'd like some understanding as to what you're going to do before we leave."

"I have already told your sister I can do nothing."

"But you know, it's all very well," remonstrated Merton hotly; "we're cousins, and you have some responsibility to her. She says you have been intimate, that you forced her ——"

Everest rose from his chair with a sudden movement.

"You believed that — of me?" he asked, and Merton shrank under his eyes and tone.

"I don't know what to believe," he said sulkily.

"Will you repeat that accusation, Sybil, in my presence?" he asked, turning to her, but Sybil could not raise her eyes. She turned scarlet and looked down on the camp-table beside her.

"No, no," she faltered hurriedly, "I never said exactly that. Merton must have misunderstood."

A look of contempt passed over Everest's face as he turned again to Merton in silence, his eyes seemed to say, "You see what a liar she is."

"Will you admit your relations with her?"

"If Sybil wishes me to, yes, I admit that, otherwise I should never have admitted it to anyone."

"Then you owe her some reparation."

"I owe her *nothing*," rejoined Everest, with some heat. "It was a mutual amusement, and she understood perfectly from the very first it was not, and could not be, anything more. I decline to discuss the matter any further. It is done, over. As far as I am concerned it is effaced from my mind. What do you want, Merton? Do you want a duel with me over it, or what?"

"No, oh no, of course not," Merton replied hastily; "that can do no good. I want you to promise to marry her some time, next year, say. Why not, Everest? It has always been thought and talked of in our families, and Sybil has as much as you have. We have all hoped you two would marry."

"I refuse absolutely. You must be made of stone if you can talk of my marrying your sister when the woman I love is between life and death because of

her devotion and self-sacrifice. Sybil would not be here at all to make her mad charges and demands but for her. She is my wife, or will be as soon as I can make her so. It is useless to go on talking. Let me pass."

Merton moved from the door and Everest, without a glance at Sybil, went out.

Coming out of her tent, white with anger and vibrating with an indignation he could not repress, little as his general impulse was to condemn others, he ran almost against the doctor who was coming from Regina.

"How is she?" he asked. "Is she out of danger now? For God's sake tell me she is."

"Don't excite yourself so; yes, yes, she is out of all danger, humanly speaking. I see no reason why she should not quite recover. Of course her condition complicates matters a little, but, as far as one can judge, she is going on very well indeed."

Everest stared at him.

"Her condition? But she was in splendid health when this happened!"

The doctor stared in his turn.

"Health? Oh yes, but I was alluding to her state — being *enceinte*, I mean."

Everest paled till he was whiter than the drill he was wearing.

"Is it so?" he asked, after a second's blank gaze at the not too friendly face regarding him, "and she — did she know it herself?"

"Oh yes; I should think so, undoubtedly. Yes, I know she did, for the first thing she asked me when

we were alone was, would all this make any difference to the child."

"And what did you say?" Everest asked, with difficulty; his throat seemed dry; a cramp stretched round his heart.

"I told her no one could say, but quite possibly it would make no difference since it was so near the beginning."

"Why did she not tell me?" asked Everest blankly, incredulous still.

"Perhaps she thought it wouldn't be welcome news," grunted the doctor grumpily. He had scant sympathy with Everest's conduct as regarded his cousin, though he had shown such genuine and passionate devotion towards Regina to-day that the doctor was inclined to be lenient.

"May I see her now? Go to her?" Everest asked.

"Yes. She's had a splendid sleep, the best thing in the world for her. Only don't let her talk too much, or excite her in any way."

Everest nodded in assent and went on. A strange feeling of delight, of triumph, of joy in his possession of her, filled suddenly his veins. And she had known it all this time and had not told him! Even, he remembered, she seemed to equivocate a little once when he had questioned her.

He came into the tent with a quick step. The moon rays, softened by the white canvas through which they streamed, filled the interior with pale light, and a small lamp burned at the side of the tent under a shade. Regina was lying with her head raised on a couple of pillows and the soft masses of her fair hair

fell over the edge of the bed and in its long waving lines to the floor. The bandages disfigured her upper arm and shoulder, but the other, bare in the intense heat, showed warmly white above the blanket. The extreme pallor of her face threw up in new beauty the sweeping dark lines of her brows and the wide-open, light-filled eyes. She was looking towards the door and saw him enter. His cheek was flushed, his eyes kindling and full of fire. He looked like a man who had drunk exhilarating and unaccustomed wine. He crossed to her. He did not dare to lift her, not even touch her as he longed to do, to crush her to him. He bent over her.

“My very, very own, my life, my soul! I am so glad.”

She also did not dare to move her body, but she lifted her bare left arm and put it round his neck.

“Are you?” And her eyes grew radiant and full of intense passion as they searched his face in the tender light. “I could not tell — now — and under all the circumstances . . . I thought it might only seem a tie to you, but oh! if you are glad, Everest, I cannot tell you the delight it is to me! To know that I am to have a child by you — the most perfectly beautiful thing I have ever seen!”

“You will marry me now, won’t you, for *its* sake anyway?”

“Not for *its* sake, no, only for *yours*, if you really wish it. Do tell me the truth, Everest, it is so important for all the rest of our lives. Do you wish, would you like Sybil in my place?”

“Sybil! Never mention her name to me,” he said, while the blood surged all across his face and then left

it white again. "I hate it, loathe it and everything connected with her. I hope I may never see her again. I only want to blot out the detestable memory of her! Is that enough for you?" he asked passionately. "Do you want me to say any more?"

Regina lifted her left hand in protest.

"It is quite enough, kiss me, let us forget it all."

There was silence in the tent for a little while. Over the girl from head to foot seemed to flow a deep peace and joy like some magic balm, lulling every pain and every doubtful thought. The great loss of blood she had suffered produced in her a physical tranquillity, an attitude of mental acquiescence.

It was different with Everest. The long sleep had quickly repaired the strain of the previous hours, he was in perfect physical condition, the blood flowing at full tide and pressure in his veins and his whole brain was on fire with anger and irritation under Sybil's accusations. His whole being seemed in a violent turmoil, and on the crest of the storm within him rode like a white seagull, joyous and buoyant, the thought of his child — the last idea that had been thrown so unexpectedly into his mind, the final shock in the whole series of that terrible day, and through all the tempest of his brain it seemed to flash in and out among the storm-clouds on its white and glorious wings. He had always loved Regina more deeply than any other woman — she had all those qualities which appealed to every strain in his own nature, and now to him their love and passion and union seemed complete. This last action of hers in saving Sybil was one a man might be proud of, and it had not been done by a man but by the woman he loved,

and while she was bearing his child, and the two facts, intertwined as they were, seemed like a double steel cable binding him to her in the most passionate devotion.

He passed his arm under her head amongst the soft waves of her hair, and she seemed to feel the vibration of all the eager tumult of emotion in him pass through it. She raised her eyelids with a quick smile.

"It is such good news, such a pleasure to me. Why did you not tell me sooner if you knew?" he questioned wonderingly.

Brought up in the knowledge of and accustomed to ordinary women, he could not grasp entirely the heroic greatness of this girl's nature.

"My dearest, I could not tell you at a time when you were leaning towards separation from me. It would have seemed like trying to tie you to me against your will, to make some claim upon you, which I would never do." Her head turned restlessly on his arm. The light flooding her face showed it pale and drawn with pain.

"But it makes such a difference," he pursued. "Even if it did not affect my wishes and desires, my duty would be ——"

Regina looked up with a smile in her eyes, so darkened by suffering.

"Oh, Everest, what has duty to do with passionate love like ours? Once before you thought it your duty to marry me, and I would not have it. Don't you see that I want you to be happy? That is all I care about. Do your duty to the world, to others if you like, but do not think of it where I am con-

cerned. Let it be all passion, pleasure, desire, with me or — nothing.”

“ But then there would be another to be considered, provided for, my sweet. Did you think of that? ” Everest rejoined very softly.

“ I knew I could always make much more money than I want **for** myself, the child could have had the rest.”

Her voice was very faint, the light showed the drops of sweat standing out on her ashy forehead.

Everest bent over her.

“ Are you in pain now? ”

“ Oh yes; I ache, I ache in every fibre; it is the constriction of lying so long without moving; but you must not worry about it; there will be such lots of it to bear! ”

CHAPTER XI

VAE VICTIS

A **WONDERFUL** deep bank of orange glowed all across the western sky, and the light of the sunset fell like a mantle over the limitless expanse of the desert stretching away for ever, as it seemed, beneath the flaming clouds. Round the camp that lay between the rocky ridges to east and west was some stir and excitement. A train of camels bearing tents and outfits stood ready waiting the signal to depart. A group of figures were in parley before the three white tents that still stood pitched upon the sand.

Sybil and Merton, with their part of the camp, their servants, guides and camels, were going.

The figures waited in silence outside the closed doors of Regina's tent. In a moment or two Everest came out.

"You can come and say good-bye to her now. She is waiting for you," he said, as he joined the group. Graham started forward immediately. Sybil's feet seemed to cling to the sand, she hesitated and murmured half inaudibly: "I don't want to see her."

Everest said nothing. He merely looked at her, and Sybil walked forward mechanically and entered the tent.

On the bed, with her head raised, lay Regina, her great flashing eyes turned towards them all as they

pressed in. Her face was like marble in its whiteness, even her lips were colourless. Her whole shoulder, right arm and side were a mass of bandages, the soft cloudy yellow of her hair lay above her forehead and fell over her left arm. Sybil approached the bed and said nervously:

“Good-bye, *Regina*, I hope you will get over it soon. I expect you will. *Everest* is such a splendid nurse.” There was a half-suppressed sigh at the end of her words, and as they fell on the silence in the tent all the three men who heard it glanced involuntarily at *Everest*. It was quite clear in that moment to them all that of the two women, *Sybil*, standing upright, erect, untouched in her full power and beauty, envied bitterly the one who was lying crushed and broken, maimed and disfigured in the shadow of death, at her feet, simply because of the delight of this man’s presence that she would have about her which would outweigh delirium and fever and pain. It came in upon them all for a moment, a glimpse of the greatness of a woman’s love, even when it has a base and selfish form, the value of it, the immense proportion it has in a woman’s scheme of things.

They felt the truth, that *Sybil*, fresh and strong and sound, only longed to change place with the other, shattered and in pain, to know his touch and his kiss.

The colour came hotly to *Everest*’s cheek as he felt all the men turn their eyes on him and heard the keen envy in *Sybil*’s tone, and he said hurriedly:

“No nursing, I am afraid, can help her much in such suffering as hers.”

Regina put out her left hand and smiled, letting

her eyes wander over the wonderfully beautiful lines of the face above her which she had rescued from destruction.

“Good-bye, Sybil; I am so glad to know you are not hurt at all.”

Their hands clasped, but there was no warmth in Sybil’s pressure. She knew that the other, helpless, perhaps about to die, had yet — won; that she was absolutely content and happy, and that the one who walked out of the tent into life and freedom was vanquished. She turned abruptly.

“Can I go now?” she said almost rudely to Everest, and he held up the door flap for her in silence and stood back for her to pass.

Graham’s farewell was very different from his sister’s. He fell on his knees beside the low tent bed and took the unwounded hand. His face was as white as hers, and looked drawn and livid as he raised it to his host, who was standing with his arms folded at Regina’s feet, his eyes fixed on her.

“Everest, give me leave to say good-bye to her alone,” he entreated, and Everest made a signal to the others and they went out, leaving Graham sobbing at her side, his tears falling on her hand.

Outside in the hot, ruddy light that the west was throwing on the desert before it donned its violet evening robe of twilight and cool silver cloak, Everest lifted Sybil on to her riding camel for the last time and wondered at himself for the sense of hatred he felt for her. Only such a short time before and his whole frame had vibrated with passion and longing for her, in that very same action, and now the sickening sense of aversion was so great as the slight light

figure touched his arms that he had to use all his self-command to prevent her seeing it. She saw his face pale with the effort, but only thought he was shaken with emotion at their final parting.

The camel rose to its feet and rocking, swaying, lifted her into the air, far above him, but she bent down and in the crimson light her face hung over him.

“Everest, good-bye; but it is not for long, is it? You will come up to Scotland soon, won’t you—I can never forget.”

She saw a new expression pass over his face which she did not understand; but how beautiful, how wonderful his face was, no matter what look it wore. She gazed upon it wistfully. Oh, to be in Regina’s place, to be lying in that tent, waited on, tended by, caressed and loved by him! How bitterly she envied her!

“Good-bye, Sybil! Please do not think of our meeting again. I do not wish it, and if it has to be I shall regret it.” Sybil sat dumb, stupefied, feeling mad with a useless misery.

“How can you be so unkind just at the last,” she whispered.

“I do not want to be unkind, but I don’t wish you to look forward to impossibilities.”

Sybil could not answer. There was an iron inflexibility in his tone against which all words of hers would seem to break in vain. She sat upright on the camel, and Everest fell back to speak to Graham, who came towards him from the tent.

The men shook hands coldly, without any demonstration either of friendliness or enmity. All the events of that wretched camping had rolled into the

past, and no words and no acts could alter them now.

When Merton had mounted the whole line started and moved off slowly to the west, making for the next stopping place, which they hoped to reach before dawn, and where they would rest through the heat of the day. The red of the sunset hung in a fiery glow before them, in the east behind them was rising steadily the silver moon.

Sybil's brain seemed to swim in mists of rage as she was borne forward. From the very first she had planned and schemed and worked for herself with that steady singleness of aim which is supposed to ensure success, and yet she had failed, failed and lost. Regina, unselfish, careless, reckless, she had won. *She* had trusted to Everest, and he had not denied *her* claims. Then she had risked her life, thrown herself absolutely into the jaws of death, and yet she had not been called upon to pay the full price, she had been allowed to come out of it all alive and crowned as a heroine. It was not like life, it was like a Sunday school tale, where the good are always saved and praised and the selfish are always punished. Sybil ground her teeth and the tears brimmed over her eyes. Why was *she* so favoured? Girls who lived as Regina was doing were abandoned every day, yet Everest meant to marry her. She knew he would never have spoken as he had unless he meant it. People who risked their lives for others generally had to give them up. Why should she be spared and come back smiling, to be nursed by him to health again?

As the camel swung forward, bearing her away

from the camp and that dear figure standing there, a suffocating sense of the injustice of Fate, an agonised realisation of failure, rode beside her into the dark shades of the falling night. The three men turned back into the camp when the procession grew indistinct in the red distance.

"It's good of you to stay, St John," remarked Everest. "I am afraid it may be dull work for you now."

"Not a bit, not a bit," he returned. "I didn't like the idea of leaving you. I might come in useful with the nursing and watching, perhaps, as an extra hand. And I'll have a look in at those lions now we've got on to them."

That same night, when the ring of protecting fires had been lighted round the camp and all the lamps were lighted, the native servants brought round to Regina's tent the skin of the lioness. They had not yet finished the dressing and preparing of it, which would take fully a week, but they thought she would like to see it, and Everest let them come in and hold it up before her at the foot of her bed.

It was a magnificent skin; the lioness was a large one, and had been in splendid condition. A little colour came into Everest's face from pride at his pupil as he saw it, but Regina's own eyes filled with tears. The skin was so golden, so beautiful, with a sheen like satin on it, the breast part so snowy white where the cruel hole her rifle had made showed its rusty coloured edges.

"Oh, Everest, I feel so sorry for her! Poor mother, and what will the cubs do now? Will they die if she no longer is there to feed them?"

Everest laughed at this view of things.

"They may not keep so fat now she is no longer able to supply them with human beings for breakfast, but they will probably get on all right. They'll go and forage for themselves. The mother goes on hunting for them long after they can hunt quite well. Let them take away the skin, dearest, if it distresses you. I can't have you crying over anything." And he told the men to take it away, and give every attention to the curing of it and do it as perfectly as possible. For it was her gift to him and he knew she wanted him to keep and value it.

Day after day passed slowly by over the white tent in the desert, where such terrible, physical suffering struggled hour by hour to dominate the spirit of happiness — in vain. Regina lay in pain and was content, and Everest, torn with anxiety, harrowed by the sight of suffering he could not assuage, passing sleepless nights and long weary days at her bedside, was yet happy too. So strange a witch, so essentially a coquette is Happiness! Men spread nets for her feet and prepare chains to bind her airy wings, and just when they fancy she is securely bound to them they look round and she is gone! And those who with tear-blinded eyes have thought they had renounced her for ever, as they have said good-bye, dear Happiness, she has leapt to their heart and said she would never leave them. She will fly from the millionaire, suffocated in the pomp of his palace, to nestle so closely at the side of some one of Life's outcasts toiling in the dust of the road. She is bound by no laws, owes no allegiance, and those who do not court her she follows most. And here in the

tent of fever and apprehension, of agony and tedium, she chose to take up her residence with these two. To Everest, in the violent reaction of mind and body, which had thrown him into the extreme of passion for this woman, it was a pleasure to deny himself, to wait upon her and suffer for her sake. He watched and waited on Regina with untiring devotion. At first, while there was great danger of fever, he never slept at all through the night, sitting by her wakeful and intent on watching the changes of her face, snatching for himself what little sleep he could in the day while the doctor took her in charge; and through all the hot long noontide hours he was there by her, reading to her when she could listen, watching her if she slept. And often the lions roared about the camp and his whole blood leapt up in a call upon him to go out into the old danger and excitement that he loved, but he checked and repressed himself and let them challenge him in vain. He knew if he left her now she would be anxious, nervous about him, and those feelings would bring on fever and retard her recovery. St John went out on several hunts, taking the guides and men with him, but neither Everest nor the doctor moved from the camp through all the burning weeks. They had their reward, for never did a patient progress more smoothly and evenly towards recovery than Regina. The iron fortitude of her nature, that enabled her to lie for hours without moving, resulted in her arm setting and joining perfectly. The absolute and silent resignation that she imposed upon herself kept the fever at bay.

One day when St John was out lion-hunting — fired by his success of yesterday, when he had brought

back in triumph a young lion to the camp — and the doctor was asleep in his tent, Everest sat by Regina combing and brushing into order the long strands of her hair, that he had never once allowed to grow tangled or matted in neglect. In the dry, sunny air of the desert it had grown more golden and more crisp, and as he brushed it, it curled and sprang round his fingers in shining silky curls and meshes.

Regina looked up at him suddenly.

“ I am so sorry you should have such a wretched time. Fancy you, with all your life and energy, shut up here day after day nursing a sick girl in a tent ! ”

Everest let the gold strands twine round his wrist as he leant over her, his eyes full of ardent joy and delight in her.

“ And yet, do you know that this time of nursing a sick girl in a tent has been the happiest in my life ? ”

CHAPTER XII

DAWN

IN the silvery light of a soft grey dawn, while morning's face was still gently veiled, two camels stood with heads towards Khartoum, and as the first rosy shaft of light quivered in the sky Regina came to the door of her tent and looked out with glad and joyous eyes. She was very pale from her long seclusion, but tall and straight and supple as always. Uninjured, undisfigured, with the power restored to her right arm, she stood on the golden sanded floor, under the high arched roof of the sky, rejoicing in the life given back to her.

That day they would commence the return journey by very easy stages, only travelling a little in the cool of the evening and the dawn so as not to fatigue her, and she looked out on the great sandy space over which they had to travel fearlessly, eager to brave its dangers and pierce its mysteries, and even as the desert stretched before her uncertain, unknown, full of radiant mist, so lay her future uncertain, unknown, but gleaming brightly, calling her to it. Her marriage at Khartoum, and then maternity, with all its complex pains and cares, but she dreaded nothing. She was ready always to meet life and wrestle with it, and she would always conquer, for of such stuff are life's conquerors made. Overhead the sky gleamed

like the inner shell of an oyster, in marvellous tones of palest green and rose, iridescent like mother of pearl, and in slow magnificence, in dazzling gold, the sun appeared over the rim of the earth.

Just at that moment Everest came to the tent door and stood by her, and the east flung its glory over them both, irradiating their faces in glowing light.

“It is the springtime now,” murmured Regina softly. “I wish we could be in the enchanted garden again together in a dawn like this.”

“I do not mind where I am as long as you are with me,” he answered, drawing her close to him. “Love like yours makes of the whole world an enchanted garden.”

And as she heard his words the glory of the dawn was not greater than the glory in her eyes.

They Were Alone

The magic of the desert night had closed about them. Cairo, friends,—civilization as she knew it—were left far behind. She, an unbeliever, was in the heart of the trackless wastes with a man whose word was more than law.

And yet, he was her slave!

"I shall ask nothing of you until you shall love me," he promised. "You shall draw your curtains, and until you call, you shall go undisturbed."

And she believed him!

Do you want to see luxury beyond your imagination to conjure,—feel the softness of silks finer than the gossamer web of the spider—hear the night voices of the throbbing desert, or sway to the jolting of the clanking caravan?

Egypt, Arabia pass before your eyes. The impatient cursing of the camel men comes to your ears. Your nostrils quiver in the acrid smoke of the little fires of dung that flare in the darkness when the caravan halts. The night has shut off prying eyes. Yashmaks are lowered. White flesh gleams against burnished bands of gold. The children of Allah are at home.

And the promise he had given her?...let Joan Conquest, who knows and loves the East, tell you in

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the man who sold his life for

One Hour of Love

*Here are two pages selected at random from
THE HAWK OF EGYPT—
a love story without asterisks.*

DAMARIS bowed her head so that the curls danced and glistened in the light, as the torrent of his words, in the Egyptian tongue, swept about her like a flood.

“Hast thou come to me in love, thou dove from the nest? Nay, what knowest thou of love? I ask it not of thee—yet—but the seed I shall plant within thee shall grow in the passing of the days and the nights and the months and the years, until it is as a grove of perfumed flowers which shall change to golden fruit ready to the plucking of my hand.”

He pressed her little hands back against her breast so that the light fell full upon her face, and he held her thuswise, watching the colour rise and fade.

“Allah!” he whispered. “Allah! God of all, what have I done to deserve such signs of Thy great goodness? Wilt thou love me?” He laughed gently. “Canst thou look into mine eyes and shake thy golden head which shall be pillow'd upon my heart—my wife—the mother of my children? Look at me! Look at me! Ah! thine eyes, which were as the pools of Lebanon at night, are as a sun-kissed sea of love. Thou know'st it not, but love is within thee—for me, thy master.”

And was there not truth in what he said? May there not have been love in the heart of the girl?

Not, maybe, the love which stands sweet and sturdy like the stocky hyacinth, to bloom afresh, no matter how often the flowers be struck, or the leaves be bruised,

THE HAWK OF EGYPT

from the humdrum bulb deep in the soil of quiet content. But the God-given, iridescent love of youth for youth, with its passion so swift, so sweet; a love like the rose-bud which hangs half-closed over the door in the dawn; which is wide-flung to the sun at noon; which scatters its petals at dusk.

The rose!

She has filled your days with the memory of her fragrance; her leaves still scent the night from out the sealed crystal vase which is your heart.

But an' you would attain the priceless boon of peace, see to it that a humdrum bulb be planted in the brown flower-pot which is your home.

And because of this God-given love of youth which was causing her heart to thud and the blood to race through her veins, she did not withdraw her hands when he held and kissed them and pressed his forehead upon them.

“Lotus-flower,” he whispered so that she could scarcely hear. “Bud of innocence! ivory tower of womanhood! temple of love! Beloved, beloved, I am at thy feet.” And he knelt and kissed the little feet in the heelless little slippers; then, rising, took both her hands and led her to the door; and his eyes were filled with a great sadness, in spite of the joy which sang in his heart as he took her into the shelter of his arms.

“I love thee too well,” he said, as he bent and kissed the riotous curls so near his mouth. “Yes, I love thee too well to snatch thee even as a hungry dog snatches his food, though, verily, I be more near to starving than any hungry dog. What dost thou know of love, of life, in the strange countries of the East? For thy life will

"I have owned a hundred women!"

he answered defiantly.

The girl recoiled as from a blow. Was this man who paraded his conquests before her the same one who had feasted so freely on her lips that moonlit night in Grand Canary?

She was his prisoner now. He had stolen her and brought her to his stronghold in the desert. Her father was also a captive. Pansy Langham's life had crashed in ruins about her. What good were her millions now? The mask had been removed. Raoul Le-Breton was the Sultan Casim El Ammeh!—a Mohammedan!

And yet she wanted no man's kisses but his. Love for him consumed her, but race and religion stood between them.

Little did she guess that the Arab had foreseen this minute, that he had trailed her father, Sir George for fifteen years. The Englishman, a captain at the time, had killed his father. Casim El Ammeh had not forgotten. Revenge was his at last!

He had intended having his way with her and then selling her as a slave—a fate more cruel than a white man could conceive. But love—an emotion an Arab scoffs at—had come to thwart him. Was he to forego his oath of an eye for an eye, or open the doors of his harem and seek forgetfulness?

Read

A Son of the Sahara

By Louise Gerard

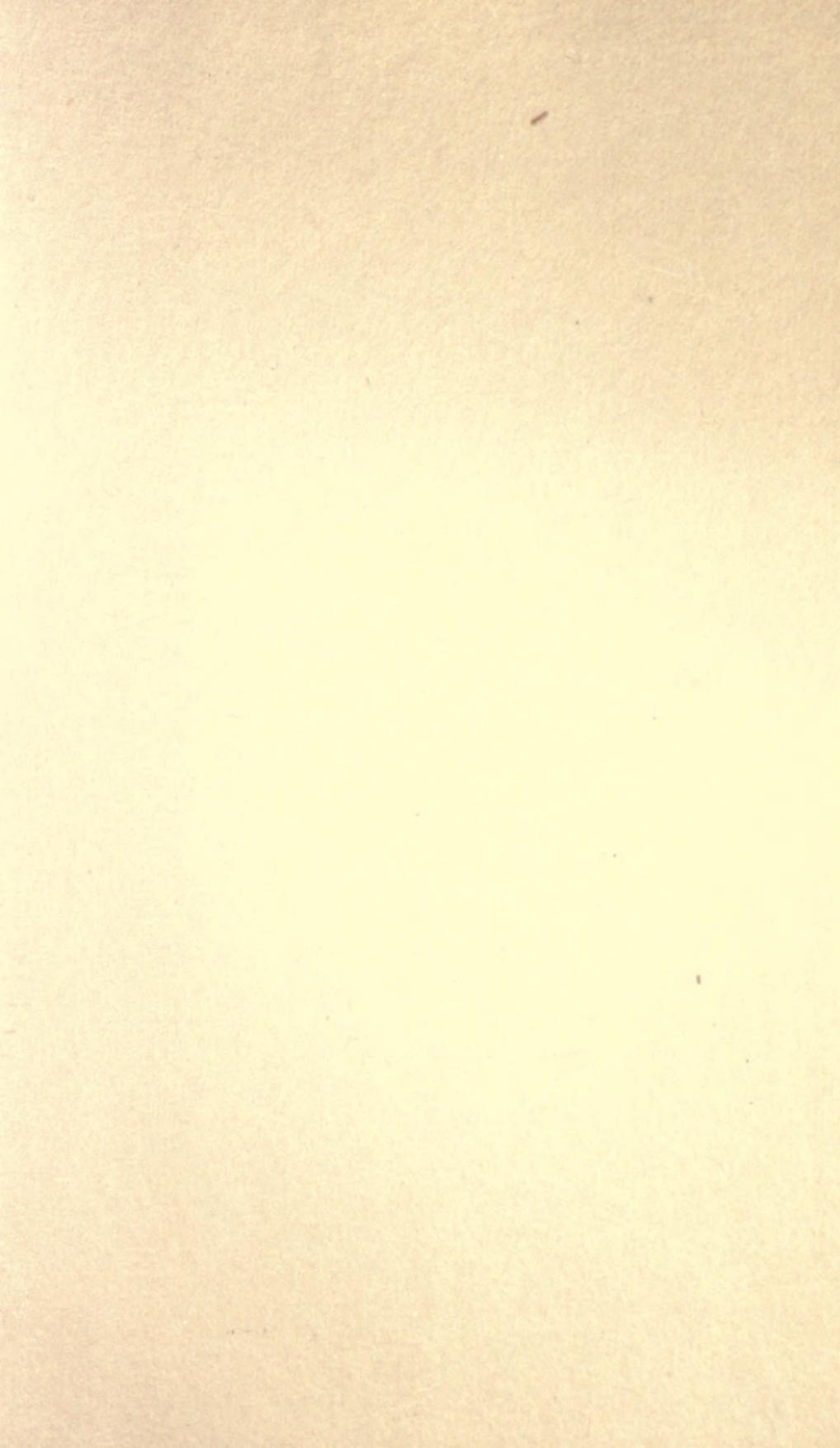
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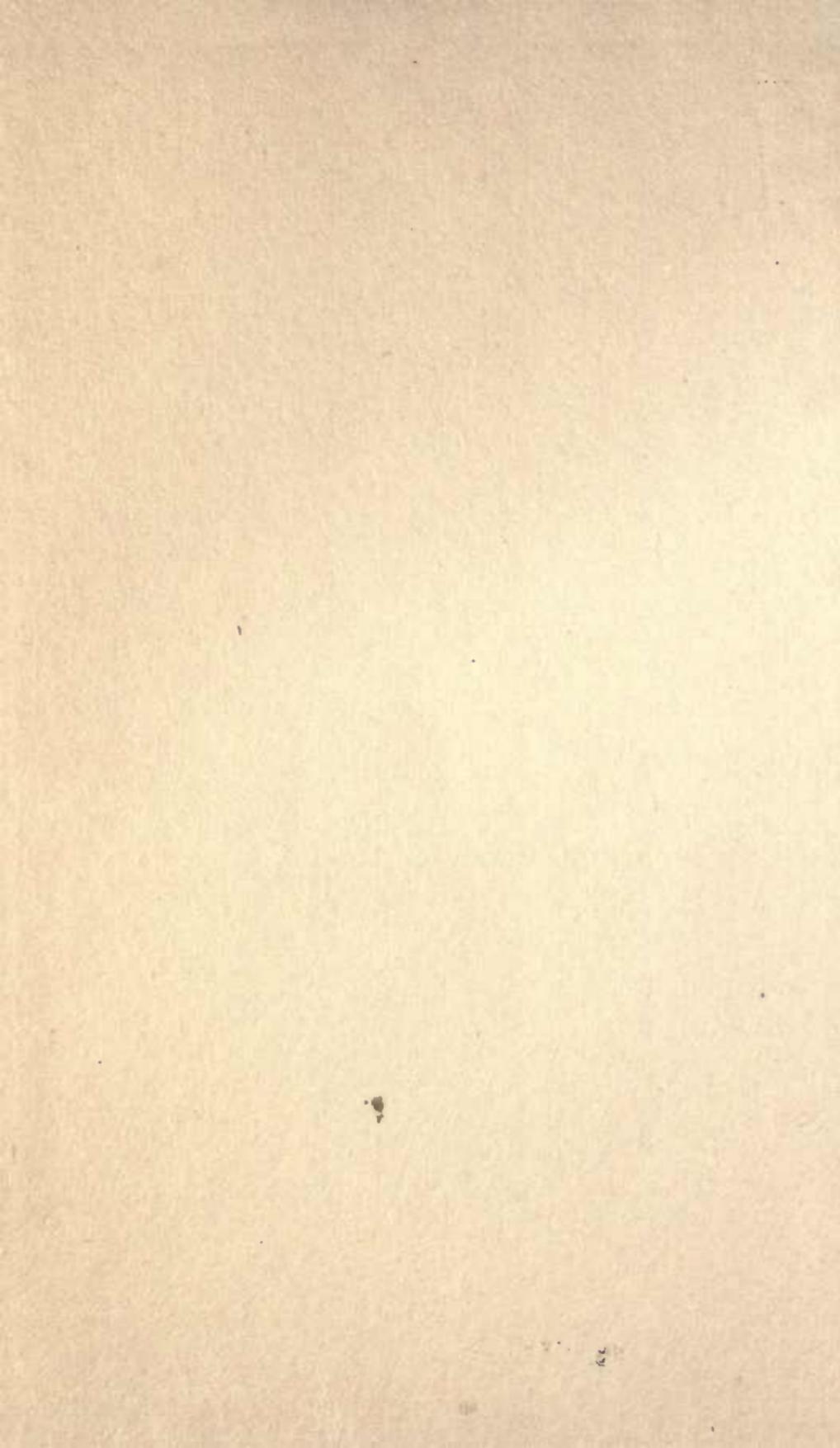
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